

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

SENT TO D.C.

6-29-01

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

I. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: United States Post Office  
OTHER NAMES/SITE NUMBER: Old Chicago Main Post Office

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 433 West Van Buren Street      NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A  
CITY OR TOWN: Chicago      VICINITY:  
STATE: IL      CODE: 031      COUNTY: Cook      ZIP CODE: 60607

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property \_\_\_  meets \_\_\_ does not meet (i) National Register Criteria I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally \_\_\_ statewide \_\_\_ locally. ( \_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

William L. White / SHP  
Signature of certifying official  
State Historic Preservation Officer, Illinois Historic Preservation Agency  
State or Federal agency and bureau

6-29-01  
Date

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.  
( \_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:      Signature of the Keeper      Date of Action

\_\_\_ entered in the National Register      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_  
    \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_  
    \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ removed from the National Register      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_

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**5. CLASSIFICATION**

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**OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY:** Public: United States Postal Service

**CATEGORY OF PROPERTY:**

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

<b>NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:</b>	<b>CONTRIBUTING</b>	<b>NONCONTRIBUTING</b>
BUILDINGS	1	0
SITES	0	0
STRUCTURES	0	0
OBJECTS	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>

**NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER:** N/A

**NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING:** N/A

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**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

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**HISTORIC FUNCTIONS:** GOVERNMENT/ Post Office

**CURRENT FUNCTIONS:** VACANT/ Not in use

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**7. DESCRIPTION**

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**ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION:** Classical Revival/ Art Deco

**MATERIALS:**

- FOUNDATION:** Concrete
- ROOF:** Asphalt
- WALLS:** Limestone
- OTHER:** Terra Cotta  
Granite

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION:** See Continuation Sheets

**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

**APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA:**

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.*
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.*
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.*
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.*

**CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS: N/A**

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.*
- B. Removed from its original location.*
- C. A birthplace or a grave.*
- D. A cemetery.*
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure.*
- F. A commemorative property.*
- G. Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.*

**AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE:** ARCHITECTURE; COMMUNICATIONS; POLITICS/GOVERNMENT;  
TRANSPORTATION; COMMERCE

**PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE:** 1921-1951

**SIGNIFICANT DATES:** 1921,1934

**SIGNIFICANT PERSON:** N/A

**CULTURAL AFFILIATION:** N/A

**ARCHITECT/BUILDER:** Graham, Anderson Probst & White

**NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:** See Continuation Sheets

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:** See Continuation Sheets

**PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS):** N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.*
- previously listed in the National Register*
- previously determined eligible by the National Register (1983)*
- designated a National Historic Landmark*
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_*
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_*

**PRIMARY LOCATION OF ADDITIONAL DATA**

- State Historic Preservation Office*
- Federal agency*
- University*
- Other State agency*
- Local Government: Commission on Chicago Landmarks*
- Other: Name of repository:*

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**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

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ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: Less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES:	ZONE EASTING		NORTHING	ZONE EASTING		NORTHING
	1	16	447000	4636000	3	_____
	2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____
	_____		_____	_____	_____	

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: See Continuation Sheet

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION: See Continuation Sheet

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**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

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NAME/TITLE: Susan M. Baldwin and Caleb Christopher

ORGANIZATION: Baldwin Historic Properties

DATE: February 3, 2001

STREET & NUMBER: 233 East Wacker Drive #410

TELEPHONE: 312.228.0707

CITY OR TOWN: Chicago STATE: IL

ZIP CODE: 60601

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**ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION**

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CONTINUATION SHEETS:

MAPS:

- A USGS MAP (7.5 OR 15 MINUTE SERIES) INDICATING THE PROPERTY'S LOCATION.
- A FLOOR PLAN(S) FOR INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES
- A SKETCH MAP FOR HISTORIC DISTRICTS AND PROPERTIES HAVING LARGE ACREAGE OR NUMEROUS RESOURCES.

PHOTOGRAPHS:

- REPRESENTATIVE BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE PROPERTY.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS:

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**PROPERTY OWNER**

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NAME: John Sorenson C/O Unites States Postal Service

STREET & NUMBER: 4301 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 300

TELEPHONE: 703.526.2782

CITY OR TOWN: Arlington STATE: VA

ZIP CODE: 22203

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### 7. DESCRIPTION:

#### The Site

Located just west of the Chicago River which bounds Chicago's Loop, the United States Post Office building, commonly referred to as the Old Chicago Main Post Office, was built in two phases - an original 1921 section, (built as the United States Mail Building), originally facing north and now visible only on the east facing the Chicago River, with a much larger 1934 structure forming a taller, c-shaped mass surrounding and encompassing the original. The 1934 construction resulted in the demolition of eight structural bays of the earlier building, four at the north end (including the original public entrance) and four at the south end. In plan, the full structure occupies two city blocks, bounded by Van Buren Street on the north, Canal Street on the west, Harrison Street on the south, and the Chicago River on the east. The Eisenhower Expressway bisects the building extending east-west on the ground level, with the remaining floors of the building spanning over the expressway. The entire structure is also built above a major rail yard, which services the Chicago Union Station just to the north of the post office. The post office building is roughly massed as a rectilinear cube approximately 800 feet long in the north/south direction by 345 feet long in the east-west direction, with towers at the four corners. There is a setback on the east side of the building running the full length between the corner towers, with the lower section of the structure being the remaining portion of the original 1921 building. The general mass of the building stands approximately 190 feet high, with the corner towers at 230 feet and the east setback at approximately 115 feet.

The structure is built on a steel frame structure spanning rail yards below, so that none of the existing site is at grade level. The site is comprised of concrete sidewalks and curbs, and concrete or asphalt paving at parking areas and access drives.

The north end of the site (Van Buren Street) includes a monumental granite stairway leading to the building's main entrance, with large flanking lighting towers. These towers are ornamental bronze and glass, square in plan and rectilinear in elevation. Existing bronze handrails at the stairs are not original to the building. Concrete sidewalks and curbs run along Van Buren Street, with large, granite-clad planters spaced along the curb line, which are not original to the building.

The east side of the site is divided into north and south segments by the Eisenhower Expressway. The south segment includes a concrete apron and service drive between the Post Office building and an adjacent warehouse building. The adjacent warehouse building is not included in this site. Where the adjacent building steps back, away from the post office building, the concrete deck at sidewalk level ends at a low concrete wall, exposing the rail yard below. The north segment of the east side includes concrete sidewalks and curbs, a concrete handicapped ramp serving the main lobby and a concrete drive serving the loading dock areas.

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Between the building and the river, there is a steel-framed concrete deck (a later addition to the site) that spans the rail yards below, with an access street ramming down to the rail yards along the river's edge.

The south side of the site includes a concrete sidewalk and curbs along Harrison Street. Sidewalk cuts and ramps are located near the center of the building to service six vehicular entrances into the building at this end. The west side of the site (Canal Street) is divided into north and south segments, divided by the Eisenhower Expressway structure. The north segment includes concrete sidewalks and curbs, and a concrete parking area. This part of the site is bounded on the west with a concrete retaining wall, painted steel guardrail and chain-link fence along the edge of Canal Street, where the street ramps down to pass under the expressway. This condition also occurs at the south segment of the west side of the site. This south segment is a similar arrangement to the north segment, with the same materials.

Area lighting throughout the site is provided primarily by building-mounted, industrial type fixtures, with similar pole-mounted fixtures located on the east side of the site and along the Canal Street retaining wall. The building itself is not lit, but there are numerous light fixtures attached to the building and surrounding the building that have been installed over time, in addition to the original standing bronze ornamental fixtures on the north elevation entrance.

The style of the building as completed in 1934 is incorporates elements of "stripped classicism" with streamlined Art Deco in the strong vertical emphasis and stylized decoration. The primary exterior material is limestone, with painted steel windows. The main body of the building has painted metal spandrel panels above and below the windows, while the corner towers have terra cotta spandrel panels. The building exterior is expressed as a distinct base, shaft and top, with the base treatment approximately 45 feet in height. The base elements consist of 2-story high openings which are as wide as two window bays on the "shaft" above. Limestone piers flank the openings and continue across the opening lintels. The openings are inset with fluted marble casings, which are in turn filled with full-height divided light glazing. Doors into the main lobby, facing north towards Van Buren Street, consist of rectangular marble archways set into the glazed openings. The south elevation facing Harrison Street has a more horizontal treatment between the corner towers to facilitate the large openings into the building's interior ramps and loading docks. A similar treatment occurs on the west elevation facing Canal Street, between the corner towers, where loading dock openings occur south of the expressway and recessed, ornamental painted steel and glass panels occur north of the expressway. The "shaft" of the building is very uniform and consists of continuous vertical window/spandrel panels flanked by continuous vertical limestone piers. At the corner towers, the vertical windows are paired to match the width of the openings in the base, with each pair being capped by a single square window above. The towers step back slightly at the top floor to create a cap, also with square windows, and also step back at the corners. Two service elevator shafts are expressed on the exterior of the building on the east side, at the setback above the original 1921 structure.

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### Building Facades

The east elevation of the building incorporates the original 1921 structure, which was built as a mail distribution center rather than a post office, and was designed in keeping with the surrounding industrial area as laid out in the Burnham plan for Chicago. It has remained a distribution facility, with loading and receiving functions, throughout its history. The style might be described as "industrial Beaux-Arts". Large openings on the ground level span between column lines to allow access to loading docks that recessed within. Facade details at the ground and second floors create a base element around the original building, with punched second floor windows and a thin cornice above. The windows are large and horizontal to allow maximum light penetration into the interior spaces. Between the windows are simple brick pilasters that run from the base element to a limestone cornice at the parapet. Two vertical elements are incorporated in this elevation, composed of additional pilasters inset between the regular column spacing, with a decorative pediment extending above the cornice line. The north facade, facing Van Buren Street, gave access to a parcel post service. This entrance was more ornate, with a Doric style portico forming the public entrance. The exterior material on the original building is primarily glazed brick, with painted steel divided-light windows. The original design for the 1934 addition included recladding the entire east facade of the 1921 building to match the newer design, but this was never completed. When the "tunnel" for the future expressway was cut through the base of the building, a square limestone archway was added to frame the new opening in the building's exterior wall.

### 1921 CONSTRUCTION:

The eastern facade is the only remaining exterior wall of the original 1921 building. Four full bays at each of the north and south ends were demolished to make way for the 1934 building, with the original west facade now buried inside the enlarged building. The remaining facade is constructed of buff-colored brick with terra cotta detailing. The base of this east wall consists of large openings for loading docks. While the openings remain, the infill of the openings has been altered from the original over time. In addition to the demolition of the original northern and southern ends of the building during the construction of the 1934 building, a portion of the street level at the center of the building was removed to allow for the construction of the tunnel that now houses the Eisenhower Expressway. The 1921 brick facade, laid in common bond, is in good condition with no major damage to the exterior. The facade around the newer expressway opening was re-clad in limestone to match the design of the 1934 building. At the loading docks, the original openings were enlarged by removing the lintels and small windows above, and installing new lintels at a higher level. The brick areas around the new lintels were infilled with new, mismatched brick.

At the street level on the east elevation, there are loading dock openings below the monumental windows and continuing south on the 1921 United States Mail Building facade. To the south of the tower elevation, on the

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1921 facade simple doors into the building are generally recessed from the face of the building, set in from the dock openings. At the fourth opening south from the tower, there is an original elevator shaft, containing three freight elevators, as indicated on the plans.

The east facade is the only remaining exterior wall of the original 1921 building, which rises to a height of six stories. The second story windows are similar to those of the upper stories except that they are slightly narrower openings, punched into the brick facade. Above the 45 foot base of the building, the fenestration pattern is regular, with sets of three windows divided by thin metal mullions, set between continuous brick piers that rise to the cornice at the top of the building. The windows are fixed-panel, steel frame, divided light with operable hinged vent sashes located in the center of each window. Window openings and parapets do not have any flashings installed. Some original window openings have been infilled with masonry. Some of the windows or window sash have been replaced with louvers.

The 1921 United States Mail Building features terra cotta cornices at several levels, all of simple design. Above the third story is a composite projecting cornice below a decorative frieze with a Greek fret pattern. Another terra cotta cornice is at the original top, fifth story.

### 1934 CONSTRUCTION

The primary exterior material of the 1934 structure is limestone cladding, with a low black granite base around the building's perimeter. The primary elevations on the north, west and south sides of the building feature large corner towers, each taller than the main mass of the building, with the building's mass spanning the area between the towers. The towers also flank the 1921 structure, but the main mass of this side of the building is recessed about three bays from the face of the 1921 older structure. The recessed area of the east facade is clad in buff-colored face brick, laid in common bond, similar to that of the 1921 structure instead of the limestone used across the rest of the building. The towers and main mass of the building are each divided into a distinct base, shaft and cap.

The building's base is approximately 45 feet tall, divided into two stories, and is distinctly different from the main mass of the building. A shallow limestone cornice runs continuously around the top of the base, as does a low, black granite flush base. The base of the corner towers, and of the north facade at the building's main entrance, is composed of heavy limestone piers, fluted on the inside vertical faces and capped by a heavy limestone lintel. Ornamental aluminum-framed windows infill the openings between the piers and run continuously up two stories. At the base of the window openings are limestone shelves supported by simplified balustrades. At the southern towers, at the west and east elevations, the large windows do not extend to the ground, but instead are held up by metal lintels to allow for ground-level openings into the building. The west facade base is divided into northern and southern segments by the openings for the Eisenhower Expressway



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tunnel, clad with a rectangular archway of flush limestone. This section of the building's base is designed as large, horizontal openings spanning full column bays, and contains either loading docks (at the south end) or ornamental storefronts (at the north end). The columns between the bays are clad with fluted cast iron enclosures. Rectangular punched windows (three per bay, single-light, double hung, steel frame) occur at the second level, above the large street-level openings. This base design is repeated at the south facade of the building, between the corner towers, where entrances to interior vehicular ramps are located.

The main lobby entrances at Van Buren Street on the north elevation, and its flanking tower bases, are in generally good condition. Seven of the bays along the north elevation contain entrances: the three central bays and two on each end. Between these openings are two similar openings on each side which contain information windows. The entrances consist of bronze revolving doors set in freestanding, white marble surrounds and flanked by bronze radiator grilles. One of the revolving entrance doors on each end have been removed, with operable panel double doors installed in the circular enclosures. The revolving doors are in poor condition and do not meet current codes. The marble surrounds are in turn set within two-story recessed openings that are otherwise filled with monumental multi-paned windows of ornamental cast metal frames and mullions. The metal frames are currently painted. The information windows between the sets of entrances have been hoarded over below the windows. A monumental granite stair with flanking ornamental light towers leads up to the lobby entrances. These original light fixtures are a composite Art Deco design of rectangular segments, and remain in good condition. A series of bronze, cantilevered flag poles have been added to the north facade piers.

Above the building's base, the facade of the upper level "shaft" is divided into uniform vertical limestone piers with recessed strips of vertical window openings between. Three window bays span each structural column bay. Windows at this section of the building are mostly triple-hung, single light with painted steel frames, although some are double-hung. Spandrel panels in this area are painted ornamental aluminum. This facade design is repeated on the west, north and south facades, between the corner towers and above the building base. The facade of the east side of the building, above the 1921 structure, is a similar design but clad in brick instead of limestone. This brick was tuckpointed sometime in the not-too-distant past. The facades of the corner towers are very similar to that of the rest of the building with two exceptions. First, the double-hung windows are grouped in pairs divided by narrow, continuous stone mullions, flanked by wider limestone piers which continue the lines of the wide base piers below. Second, the spandrel panels are of a different material - black terra cotta at the towers, versus metal elsewhere. The corners of the towers have shallow setbacks of limestone cladding, which continue upwards to form a cap above.

The cap elements of the facades differ between the main building mass and the corner towers. At the main mass, the vertical piers of the shaft are capped by a thin limestone cornice. The facade then steps back slightly

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as a solid limestone band, one story tall, with punched, square window openings. These windows are triple-hung painted steel and single-light, similar to those below. The caps of the towers are a bit more elaborate. The vertical shafts continue one story higher than at the main mass, and are then ended by larger, square windows. Each of these windows spans two window bays below. A horizontal limestone frieze is located above the square windows, and then the facade steps back slightly. The setback forms a limestone-clad cap with more square windows, which is in turn capped with a limestone cornice.

All the north, west and south elevations of the upper stories have essentially the same fenestration pattern. The main building shaft elevations between the four corner towers are divided into slightly projecting vertical limestone piers with continuous vertical window openings between, separated only by the spandrels. Three window bays span each column bay. The windows are mostly triple-hung, single-light sash with painted steel frames, although some are double-hung. The pattern of the corner towers is similar, though the windows are double-hung, and set in pairs divided by slender continuous brick mullions and flanked by the projecting piers rising from the base.

On the main portion of the 1934 building, the vertical piers are capped by a narrow limestone cornice, in fair condition. The facade then steps back slightly as a solid limestone band, one story tall, with punched, square window openings. The caps of the towers are a bit more elaborate. The vertical shafts continue one story higher than at the main mass, and are then ended by larger, square windows, each of which spans two window bays below. A horizontal limestone frieze is located above the square windows, and then the facade steps back slightly, forming a limestone-clad cap with more square windows, capped in turn with a limestone cornice.

At the top of the building, the facade then steps back slightly as a solid limestone band, one-story tall, with punched, square window openings. These windows are triple-hung, painted steel and single-light, similar to those below. The towers continue one story higher than the main mass, and are then ended by larger, square windows. Each of these windows spans two window bays below. A horizontal limestone frieze is located above the square windows, and then the facade steps back slightly. The setback forms a limestone-clad cap with more square windows, which is in turn capped with a limestone cornice.

All sections of the building have a flat, built-up roof behind a twelve-foot high parapet wall. Mechanical penthouses and equipment are located on the roof. The original 1921 building included two small elevator equipment penthouses, still existing, located behind the ornamental pediments at the tops of the elevator shaft towers. These are not visible from the street level. A new mechanical penthouse has been added to the roof of the structure, covering most of the original roof area. The general mass of this new penthouse matches the height of the original parapet, and is not visible from the street. However, several smaller sections of the new penthouse project above the parapet level by approximately one story. These projections are visible from the

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street, are clad in corrugated metal panels and are located along the face of the 1934 structure, set back from the east face of the building.

The 1934 building includes two original penthouses, both clad in limestone and neither visible from the street. One is located in the northwest quadrant of the main roof and includes elevator equipment and an exit stair. The other is located along the east wall parapet, and runs from the southeast to the northeast corner towers. The height of these penthouses match the height of the parapet, at approximately 12 feet above the roof level, and house elevator equipment, exit stairs and mechanical equipment. A new penthouse has been added, running from the east side of the original northwest quadrant structure towards the east, and connecting to the original penthouse at the east parapet. This new penthouse is clad with corrugated metal panels, and houses mechanical equipment.

The building's street level floor height is raised above the surrounding sidewalk level, creating changes in elevation between the interior and exterior of the building. The first floor windows of the north and south elevations and the towers wrapping around onto the first four bays of the east and west elevations are monumental two-story tall, fixed divided-light windows with aluminum frames. The frames have interior steel support members, and ornamental ironwork fascias. They are in generally good condition. The seals and caulking around the frames have failed, but the general structure and ornamentation is sound. Glass is in general need of replacement.

The west elevation north of the expressway contains historic storefronts, which are recessed into larger bay openings in the limestone facade. The structural columns between the openings are clad in fluted cast iron enclosures, most of which are still existing but often are damaged. The storefronts are similar to the monumental windows at the main lobby, and consist of aluminum frames with ornamental cast iron fascia, with infill panels of painted metal or glass. Each storefront extends from the ground level floor to a recessed soffit condition above, with a flush granite base from the floor level to the sidewalk below. The storefronts are in good condition. An original employee entrance is still intact just south of the northwest corner tower, although it has been modified. Original doors have been replaced with contemporary anodized aluminum and glass doors.

The west elevation south of the expressway has similar masonry openings to those of the storefronts, and the same cast iron column enclosures, but the recessed areas originally contained loading dock doors instead of storefront. Ornamental metal soffits, similar to the historic storefront, span the top of the facade openings from column to column. The original doors have been replaced with infill of newer overhead doors, coiling doors, man doors and windows. The street level of the south towers varies from the more typical conditions at the north end. While the southern faces of the towers match the typical layout, sections of the west and east faces

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are different. At these areas, the two-story windows do not extend all the way to the ground, but are supported by metal lintels above the first floor, originally allowing additional access to loading docks, which are now sealed shut.

The center section of the south facade of the building includes two small sections of original storefront, flanking the loading dock doors and recessed into larger openings in the facade. These storefronts match those of the north segment of the west side of the building, described above. The center three bays of the facade originally included large overhead doors, one per structural bay, for access to the interior system of vehicular ramps and loading docks. The loading dock doors are detailed similarly to those at the south end of the west side of the building, described above. Small attendant booths have been added at the two column lines between the three bay openings. The original overhead doors have been removed and replaced with a mix of newer overhead doors, overhead coiling doors and man doors. Several of these newer doors have been sealed shut. An original employee entrance is located at the south face of the southeast corner tower, similar to the entrance at the north end of the west facade. This entrance has been modified, with new glass and metal doors set in the original frame.

### Interior

#### Lobby

A grand lobby stretches across the entire north end of the building, extending 350 feet from the west end to the east end. The lobby was originally T-shaped, with the leg of the T extending on a cross axis from the center of the main lobby south to the expressway tunnel. The "leg" functioned as ancillary service spaces, with a ceiling lower than the main lobby. This leg no longer exists. The north lobby is 40 feet wide, and consists of the long center portion with smaller sections at the west and east ends, separated by projecting pilasters on the north and south walls. A large, freestanding postal service kiosk sets at the center/west area of the lobby. Two overhead coiling grilles have been installed at the center and west areas, spanning from the south to the north walls. The lobby is clad in white marble, with a checkerboard and bordered stone floor. The even rhythm of the exterior bays is reflected on the back (south) wall of the lobby with matching pilasters. The opening between the pilasters contained teller booths at the ground level, with infill panels above clad in French gold glass mosaic tiles. These tiles are also used in the elevator lobbies at either end of the main lobby. The 38 foot high ceiling is ringed with a heavy plaster cornice, with plaster "beams" spanning in the north-south direction. Large bronze and glass rectilinear pendants, similar to the light towers outside, are mounted along the center axis at regular intervals. The detailing throughout the lobby, while intricate and extensive, follows the simple, well-proportioned design of the rest of the building.

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The walls of the lobby are divided into base, piers and cornice. A tall, black base runs around the perimeter of the lobby, made of either black granite at solid walls and piers, or black terra cotta at radiator cabinets. The height varies, but is around 24 inches. The piers along the exterior walls coincide with those at the exterior facade of the building, and run in a regular rhythm along the east, north and west walls. The south wall continues the same pier rhythm and detailing. All of the piers are continuous from the floor to the plaster cornice at the ceiling, and are clad with white marble. The marble is cut in flat, flush panels on the front faces, and fluted in the inside recessed vertical faces. Additional projecting piers separate the main lobby space from the east and west ends. Most of the wall marble is in good condition, except for sections that were demolished to mount the overhead coiling grilles. The area between the piers is infilled with monumental windows on the east, north and west walls. At the base of the windows is a radiator cabinet made of a white marble frame with tile infill, black terra cotta base and a bronze cap.

The far east segment of the south wall remains substantially as originally built. Above the first story level openings in the south walls are infill panels clad in gold glass mosaic tiles, originally custom made in France. These tiles are substantially intact, and also occur above elevator doors and at the end of the elevator lobbies on the first floor. The center three bays of the south wall were originally open the full height of the walls, to a small vestibule area which transitioned down to a lower ceiling height at the former cross-axis corridor. The portions of these openings have been infilled with white marble panels to match the adjacent piers. The south walls retain the original piers and overall design, but have been altered at the floor level. The original teller windows at the center portion of the lobby have been removed. At the east segment, the space between the pier that originally held teller windows is now open, providing access to new postal box areas to the south. At the west segment, the original teller windows have been replaced with new teller booths. At the far west end, former open spaces at the south wall have been infilled with new counters and doors.

The ceiling of the lobby consists of a perimeter soffit and cornice, an overall field of ornamental beams and recessed plaster ceilings, and large, ornamental bronze pendant light fixtures. The perimeter soffit is made of painted plaster, which projects horizontally from the top of the wall before turning upwards into an ornamental cornice. The flat horizontal plane contains gilded medallions spaced at regular interval around the perimeter of the lobby. The main field of the ceiling is divided into three sections that reflect the lobby plan (a main center lobby space with delineated east and west ends), by a soffit clad in marble to match the adjacent walls. Each of the three ceiling areas consists of a painted plaster ceiling plane with ornamental plaster "beams" spanning the short distance at regular intervals, with one beam for every two cornice medallions. The ceiling planes between the beams are currently clad in acoustical ceiling tiles, presumably glued to the original plaster. Monumental light pendants are suspended from the ceiling plane along the center line of the lobby - six in the central lobby and one at each end. These pendants are ornamental bronze and glass, rectangular in shape and detailed similarly to the large standards outside of the main lobby entrance.

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The original floors of the north lobby are still existing, and include a checkerboard field of beige and rose Tennessee marble, with a border of Belgium Black marble and dark rose Tennessee marble. There is a large intricate geometric pattern of circles and triangles formed in marble in the center. The lobby floors are intact and in generally good condition.

### Building Plan

The long rectangular 1921 United States Mail Building is comprised of open floor work spaces arranged off the loading docks. The space originally included four to six elevator shafts, each containing three large freight elevators. Only two of these shafts remained after completion of the 1934 building, both on the east face of the building. The northern shaft still remains, open from street level to the top of the 1921 building, containing three freight elevators. The southern shaft is also still extant, but only connects the street level with the rail yard below.

The 1934 building originally contained 10 building cores, two of which contained only passenger elevators and the rest housing a combination of elevators, exit stairs and mechanical shafts. Twenty-two service elevators, eighteen passenger elevators and nine stairwells are spaced fairly regularly across the floor plate. Two passenger elevator cores are located off either end of the main lobby, and additional passenger elevator cores are located at each of the two employee entrances. The remaining cores contain large freight elevators, and are arranged in two rows running north-south. There is no grand, open or ornate staircase in the building, and no original stair shafts are existing in the 1921 building. Two of the stairs are in the east central portion of the building where the 1921 portion adjoins the 1934 portion and though within the old part, were constructed in 1934. There is one additional stairs by itself in the east portion of the 1934 construction. All of the stairs are enclosed, utilitarian in nature, of steel and concrete construction.

Between the north and south halves of the first floor, the building is bisected by the Eisenhower Expressway. The north half, behind the lobby, was originally bisected into east and west areas by a wide corridor, the cross axis corridor of the main lobby, but this space has been altered. The space is now one large area containing rows of post office boxes, and open space. To the south of the expressway, east and west work areas are divided by two-way ramps flanked by loading docks.

The north end of the second floor is the upper space of the two-story height of the lobby. To the south of that, the space is taken up by large open work/office areas, except that the southern half office areas are surrounding the upper level of the vehicle ramps coming up from the first floor, with platforms on either side and a driveway. The open space is basically unfinished, with concrete floors, exposed brick walls and exposed ceilings with mechanical equipment.

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### Office Portion

Across the full width of the north end extending approximately 54 feet to the south (the depth of the tower) is the office portion of the building. At the center of this space is a rectangular lightwell, approximately 20 feet wide by 80 feet long originally, faced in white glazed brick. The east and west ends of the light well have each been filled in to the depth of two-and-a-half bays, covered with siding. In the east and west end tower sections of the office space are the building cores, with elevators and stairs. The double-loaded corridor on each floor of the office space follows around the light well. The office spaces have been altered over the years to meet changing needs. Generally, the ceilings have been lowered with suspended acoustic tile, and original baseboards, trim, and office configurations have been replaced. Walls in this section of the building are generally finished with plaster, drywall or wood paneling, in various conditions. Floors have been covered in various materials, and new partition walls have been built. The office space extends up to the twelfth floor, with lower ceiling heights than the work rooms.

The typical office floors were on 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,11, and 12. The typical office floor generally had seven foot wide double-loaded corridors extending in a shallow U shape around the central rectangular light court, with extensions leading to the east and west elevator foyers. The north/south portions of the U lead to exit stairwells. The length and condition of the corridors varies. As originally designed, the corridors had green mosaic tile floors with a darker border, pink marble base, painted walls, and painted plaster ceilings. Office doors and frames were simple painted hollow metal, some with glass panels. In all corridors, the ceilings were removed during installation of air conditioning ductwork in the 1960's, and were lowered and covered with suspended acoustic tile. Also, all the original wall finishes have been altered. The elevator lobby areas have been altered, ca. 1985, covered with drywall and painted, and suspended ceilings have been installed.

The floorplan within the office spaces was designed to be adapted to meet the tenant's changing needs and, as a result, the building's current office space plans reflect this design benefit, many having been modified over the years. Offices can be as small as one grid within the plan (approximately 20' x 20') to as large as the entire floor. Originally the office space had three-column iron radiators placed below the windows. Some of these remain, while others have been replaced with a forced-air system. The ceiling heights of 9 ½ feet have generally not been altered, although acoustic tiles have been attached to them, and in some cases vents for the forced-air heating system added. This is also true of the structural columns, which for the most part are the original size while others have been built around to house elements of the HVAC system. Some office spaces have had sinks installed into them, although all use the bathrooms within the core of the building. The concrete floors have been carpeted or have had linoleum tile installed.

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### Postmaster's Office

On the fourth floor, the northeast corner contains the office suite of the Chicago Postmaster. While it has had alterations in the ancillary spaces and adjoining office/conference room, the corner office has retained much of its materials including the mahogany paneled walls with cornice moldings, multi-paned, wood-framed casement storm windows, wood radiator covers, doors and door frames, hardware, and the marble walls, and configuration of the foyer area. The ceiling has been covered with modern materials and lighting, and the floors have been covered, but the space retains much of its original feeling and associations.

### Murals

Floor 10, used by the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Corps, had a different arrangement including open areas instead of only offices and corridors, and had different finishes. The office room in the northwest corner of the office section of the building was covered with murals close to the time of the completion of the building in 1934. This room housed the office of the General in Charge of the Army Sixth Corps, who commissioned artist Charles Turzak to cover all four walls. The subject of the mural is a decorative map of the Sixth Corps area, and includes stylized maps with illustrative characters of historic events. The murals were painted in oil on canvas which was glued directly onto the plaster walls.

The murals have subsequently been painted over numerous times. The original room has also been subdivided by drywall partitions which are anchored to the original walls, and the ceiling has been lowered below the level of the murals, also with anchors that have punctured the murals. A conservator's report, as a result of spot testing, has indicated that they are salvageable.

### Work Rooms

The remainder of the building, including both the 1921 and 1934 sections, served as the distribution center for the region and is industrial in design. Many areas of the building have been remodeled several times throughout the building's history, due to the changes in technology and the services offered by the postal service. Many of the floors have numerous floor level changes to accommodate former equipment and vehicles. The majority of the space on each floor is open work space with flexible plans for sorting equipment, and few partitions. The floors are concrete with areas covered in different materials, exposed brick walls in most areas, and exposed ceilings with mechanical equipment. Exterior walls are typically either painted brick or plaster/drywall. There are no wall or cornice moldings. Industrial windows and doors have plain metal surrounds with no applied trim. The column spacing is fairly regular at 18 feet east to west and 12 feet north to south. The ceiling heights vary from floor to floor, and the floor levels between the office and work spaces do not match up, with higher ceilings in the work areas. Finished ceilings are typically not found in these areas of the building - the floor structure is exposed and painted. At the eighth floor is the roof of the original United States Mail Building, with



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the mechanical penthouse structure behind the twelve-foot parapet wall of the central portion. The roof over the corner towers rise to the fifteenth floor with office space in the two north towers and work space in the two south towers.

Original heating for the building consisted of a hot water radiator system running from boilers in the basement throughout the entire building. This system has been heavily modified throughout the building's history. Air handling equipment and ductwork has been added throughout the building, primarily to provide cooling. Most of the new equipment has been added to the roof, in the penthouse structures.

### Integrity

The exterior of the building has remained remarkably intact and looks much as it did when completed in 1934, including the building form, materials, design, details and fenestration. The most significant alteration to the original 1921 structure was the construction of the 1934 addition. The original west facade was encased in the new addition, while four bays each at the north and south ends were demolished, including the north portico. Also completed at that time was the tunnel running through the ground level of the building, designed to accommodate an expressway which was not completed until the late 1950's. Another modification to the 1921 structure consisted of raising the lintels above the east loading docks, and included infilling small windows and surrounding wall areas above the loading docks with mismatching brick. An elevated walkway was also built between the 1921 building and the neighboring warehouse building to the east. Some windows on the remaining 1921 facade have been replaced with ventilation louvers. A large, corrugated metal panel mechanical penthouse has been added to the roof.

Exterior alterations on the 1934 building are primarily at street level and below. Most of the original loading dock doors have been replaced, sealed or boarded up. A light well penetrating the north section of the building has been partially filled at each end with mechanical rooms clad in corrugated metal panels. As on the facade of the 1921 portion, metal ventilation louvers have been installed randomly at various places, replacing original windows, to accommodate revised HVAC and mechanical systems.

While elements have been added to the original design and a few alterations have been made, the main lobby remains mostly intact in its form, spatial elements and opulent finishes. Several freestanding post office kiosks have been added, probably in the 1970's. Two large overhead rolling grilles were also added, probably at the same time as the kiosks, and span the entire north-south width. Also at the same time, a large, permanent canopy was added over the western teller booths, and the booths themselves were altered. These alterations are all reversible. The eastern teller booths no longer exist, with the lower spaces between the pilasters open to newer post box areas. The perpendicular "leg" portion of the lobby, extending to the expressway, has been

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demolished to make room for the post box areas and additional loading zones. although there are extant portion of the transition area remaining above the suspended ceiling, including ceiling moldings and trim.

The office areas in the north section of the building have changed uses several times, and now include research laboratories, customer service areas and storage rooms. This has led to changing partition walls and office finishes, although much of the Postmaster's office has been preserved. As mentioned, the corridors and their finishes have also been changed, and the main office elevator foyers were redecorated in the 1980's, although the plan and sense of the spaces remains. While the upper story work areas have evolved over time with change in technology and operations, the basic utilitarian finishes and the open spaces remain. The general movement away from the use of railways as freight carriers led to reorganization and remodeling of the center and south sections of the building by post office planners. Most all of the post office equipment has been removed from the building, which is now vacant.

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### 8. SIGNIFICANCE

#### Summary

The United States Post Office Building in Chicago, commonly known as the Old Chicago Main Post Office, located at 433 West Van Buren Street in Chicago, Illinois, has national historic and architectural significance. The property meets Criterion A for designation on the National Register of Historic Places for its historic role in mail transportation and distribution, in commercial planning for the city of Chicago, and for labor events that shaped history during the depression and beyond. It also meets Criterion C as a significant example of large scale post office planning and design in the Classical Revival/Art Deco transitional style, by the eminent architectural firm of Graham, Anderson, Probst and White. The period of significance is from 1921 when the United States Mail Building was completed to 1951, the fifty-year cut off for significance to the National Register.

In history, the post office is significant in the areas of communication, transportation, politics/government and commerce. As a system of information management, a post office integrates communication, transportation and technology to serve the purposes of commerce. As technology in both transportation and sorting systems increased, the speed and range at which information, goods and materials could be exchanged also increased. The United States Post Office in Chicago was designed to facilitate movement of information on a broad and unprecedented scale, and became the primary mail distribution center of America into the 1950's. It was also the center of the Postal Transportation System, by which mail was sorted en route to locations across the country. It was this site which facilitated the movement of Sears and Montgomery Ward catalogs and merchandise to every state in the union.

The planning of the post office facility was the result of years of negotiations and influences of local and national agencies, beginning with the Burnham-Bennett Plan of Chicago in 1909. The plan, promulgated by the Commercial Club of Chicago, led to the post office's location just west of the Chicago River as a part of the Union Station complex, directly over the railroad tracks and centered between the commercial and industrial centers of the city. The efficiency occasioned by this deliberate integration of rail, truck, and eventually air transportation facilitated the operations. The final realization of the post office in 1934 demonstrated the continuing impact of laws, policies and political/economic events at the local, regional, and national levels.

Important developments in labor history took place at the United States Post Office in Chicago, with efforts to integrate the various ethnic and racial groups of Chicago's melting pot. The labor responsible for processing mail and parcel post witnessed the increasing mechanization of labor. As sorting and delivery systems became

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increasing mechanized to sort an exponentially-increasing volume of mail, postal workers expanded and formed new labor unions and became more active in an attempt to enforce the control of labor over machine. Many of these actions originated at Chicago's post office from the 1920's into the 1950's. In addition, the full employment and expansion of the post office during the depression was an economic boost that gave stability to the region, especially the more recent immigrant groups and the African-Americans.

The building is architecturally significant in several ways, firstly as a successful example of public monumental architecture. The architects adapted elements of the popular Classical Revival style, representative of public cultural values, to a massively scaled government function. The structure is an excellent example of the integration of design features, facilities and equipment distinctive to a post office function. The Art Deco transitional style elements reflected the necessity for simplicity and the desire for modernism.

In designing the building, the architects and engineers also overcame many structural challenges. The building was constructed directly over the railroad tracks of four different railroad companies, and also was designed to allow for the incorporation of the expressway directly through the building. In addition, the architects had to integrate the 1921 and 1934 structures into a cohesive whole. When the 1934 portion of the building was completed, at 2.5 million square feet it was the world's largest post office. This scale makes it a major landmark along the Chicago River in the center of the city, as it forms a literal and symbolic gateway into the city straddling the major access thoroughfare of the Eisenhower Expressway.

The building was designed by the Chicago architectural firm of Graham, Anderson, Probst and White, the successor firm to Daniel Burnham's architectural practice after his death in 1912. Ernest Graham, Pierce Anderson, Edward Probst and Howard White managed the firm after Burnham's death, and officially changed its name in 1917. Graham, Anderson, Probst and White was one of the largest and most prominent firms in the United States through the 1920's and 1930's, and continues to exist under this name. The firm completed many of the largest commissions in the Chicago area during the height of its work, including those that influenced the design of the post office, such as Chicago's Union Station (1922-1930), Civic Opera Building (1928), and the Merchandise Mart (1930). Completed within a ten year period, these buildings redefined the scale and style of architecture along the south branch of the Chicago River. Outside of Chicago, the firm also produced other landmarks including Cleveland's Terminal Tower and Philadelphia's Thirtieth Street Station, both of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The post office was designed during the firm's peak period, and is one of its most elegant and cohesive buildings. The building's simple, well-proportioned massing and streamlined detailing represents the highest quality of the firm's work and of post office architecture. The scale of the building among the firm's work is second only to the Merchandise Mart.

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### Chicago Post Office History

The main post office in Chicago moved fourteen times before settling in the building at 433 West Van Buren. Three of those moves were a result of fire. Three of the facilities had been constructed specifically for the post office, but most shared a building previously constructed for other purposes. The first post office building in Chicago was constructed of logs, in 1833, at Lake and Water Streets (now Wacker Drive) While half the building was post office, the other half was a general store. For a few years prior to 1833, the post office had been located in the home of trader John Kinzie, an early Chicago pioneer. The first postmaster for Chicago was appointed during this time by President Andrew Jackson, and the mail arrived every two weeks by horseback. Beginning in 1801, the "post office" had just been a shelf in the corner of a log cabin, with mail delivery about once a month from a foot soldier. By 1833, however, the mail from the east arrived every week, and the following year marked the beginning of a four-horse stage line which carried mail twice a week. The mail had increased so much in just one year that the post office moved west to a building at the corner of Franklin and South Water Streets, where more space was available. In March, 1836, Chicago received its own postmark. This was still at the time that postage was paid by the recipient when the mail was picked up. In 1837 daily mail was established with the western states and in 1838 the post office moved again, to the corner of Lake and Clark streets. In 1841 the new postmaster William Stuart relocated the post office to a building at the west side of Clark Street between Lake and Randolph, where it stayed for over ten years..

Until 1847, the postage was paid by the recipient who picked up the mail. In that year, the first United States postage stamps were issued, allowing the sender to pay the postage. As the population of Chicago was booming, the post office again outgrew its space and began a series of moves. In 1853 it moved to the Ashland Block (demolished) on the east side of Clark Street, and two years later to 84 Dearborn Street, adding on the building next door soon after. At the beginning of the Civil War, the post office moved into the first government building in Chicago, at the corner of Dearborn and Monroe streets. By the end of the war, Chicago's importance as a mail distribution center for the nation was established. It was the distribution point for the east - west mail routes, and by 1870 was second only to New York in the amount of business transacted. The Postal Record for January, 1872, reports on the business for the preceding year:

The Chicago post office now ranks second upon the books of the department at Washington in regard to business transactions. By this is meant the business which showed a revenue. But the facts are, more work is done at the Chicago post office at this time than at any other post office on this continent. Chicago is a point that catches mail from every point of the compass. For the East, West, North, and South, a great portion touches here and is handled by this office. During the past three months on several occasions, a hundred tons of mail matter has been handled a day

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in this city. Nearly twenty large wagons are required to transport these great mails between the post office and the various depots.<sup>1</sup>

This record was in spite of the great fire that occurred on October 9, 1871 which destroyed the government building. It was reported that the clerks, working feverishly, saved all of the mail and did not even miss a delivery. A temporary facility was immediately established at the corner of State and Sixteenth streets, and then by November 1 at the Wabash Avenue Methodist Church at the corner of Harrison, which had survived the flames. One event that effected commerce and postal service in Chicago and served to further establish it as a distribution center was the founding of Montgomery Ward in 1872. The first of the national mail-order houses, it was followed by Sears, Roebuck and Company at the turn of the century. Not only were the catalogues printed and distributed from Chicago, but the merchandise was manufactured and delivered from the city as well. By 1873, postal substations were being opened with four by the end of the year.<sup>2</sup>

The post office was again struck by a devastating fire in 1874, but headquarters were maintained at the West Division Station at the corner of Halsted and Washington streets for just a month, then moved again to the Honore Building at the corner of Dearborn and Adams streets. A few years later, in 1879, that building was also destroyed by fire. While work was rushed on a new government building at Clark and Adams streets, the post office again temporarily located, but moved into the new building in the next year. While postal officials believed at first that their space problems were solved for many years to come, Chicago continued to grow at such a rate that in a short time that building, too, was inadequate.

In 1885, congress voted \$4 million for a new Chicago post office, and then, in response to a local appeal that the new building display architectural merit, it was awarded an additional \$25,000 for a special architect. The cornerstone was laid in 1899, upon the same location as the previous federal building, but it was not ready for occupancy until 1905. By that time, the mail matter had increased almost 300%, and the receipts by 200%, so once again, the space was outgrown before it was even opened. As conditions became intolerable, other buildings were used, and finally Quincy Station on the west side was built to handle parcel post.

### Planning

The story of the 1921-34 post office facility begins with the Burnham-Bennett Plan of 1909. Beginning with the Chicago street grid and the natural development of the loop, it made sense to bisect the business area between the financial and retail centers to the north and the wholesale and warehouse areas to the south with a major thoroughfare extending west. This would provide a major artery linking the business district to the area west of

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<sup>1</sup> Works Project Administration, *35 Million Letters a Day: A Story of the Chicago Post Office* (Chicago: Board of Education, 1941) p.4

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6

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the river and on to the western suburbs. Burnham envisioned a grand Beaux-Arts inspired geometric scheme that underscored the street grid, and as a centerpiece proposed a major civic center just west of the river.

In 1914, the enabling ordinance for Union Station helped establish the plan, led to the location of the United States Mail Building and subsequently to the United States Post Office which wrapped around it. The railroad tracks which served the lines from the south covered the area of the proposed expressway west of the river to Canal Street. The Union Station ordinance provided for the depression of the tracks east of Canal Street and the construction of viaducts, which allowed for the east-west flow of traffic on the expressway. As mail was primarily handled by train, the United States Mail Building was conveniently located near Union Station, directly over the railroad tracks. It was initially considered part of the planning of Union Station. While many portions of the Burnham-Bennett plan were never enacted, the location of Union Station and the Post Office just west of the river over the tracks helped to reinforce Chicago as a transportation and distribution center. It also helped to maintain a certain vitality in the area west of the river.

The United States Post Office is located on the west bank of the Chicago River, just across the river from the southern portion of the Loop, which is bounded by Congress Parkway on the south. The city's business center and transit hub, an area roughly a square mile, became known as "the Loop" first for the cable cars, and later for the elevated train known as the "El" that by 1900 ringed downtown. This grid continued east to Michigan Avenue, and in this area, the buildings that developed were large and blockish, befitting their site. The Fire of 1871 had given Chicago a clean slate upon which to rebuild and the rise of skyscrapers would eventually dominate the downtown area. The reasons for this can be explained two-fold: the area upon which to build was restricted by the natural borders of the Chicago River to the west and north and the lake to the east; and the desire of business to distinguish itself from the environment it shared with other commerce at the street level. Industrial areas developed on the fringes of the Loop, with the central market just to the south of the river early on, and later to the west of the river where it turns to the south. Larger and light industrial buildings grew just to the west of the Loop across the river.

Because of the fire, the forces of business were able to distinguish themselves by using the new building technology to literally rise above the less acceptable ways of making a living. Factors that controlled the development of Chicago's central business district were, to a large degree, the city's historic mapping and municipal regulations. Chicago's large, squarish blocks of about 360 x 320 feet, with streets 60 or 80 feet wide, were laid out in the 1830s. Most blocks were bisected by an alley that ran either north-south or east-west and was a public right-of-way, preserving some of the light and air on the interior of the blocks. The development of skyscraper technology during the last decade of the nineteenth century brought larger buildings for commercial, industrial and civic uses. The dominant form of construction had moved away from all-masonry construction, which encouraged a practical height limit, to the use of steel-frame and curtain wall technology.

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On September 23, 1915, Mayor William Hale Thompson hosted a luncheon for the Illinois U.S. Congressional delegation and the Executive and special Post Office Committees of the Chicago Plan Commission for the purpose of discussing the proposed site and type of building for the Chicago post office. Inspired by that luncheon, the Mayor then held a special conference on November 1, inviting Secretary of the Treasury William G. McAdoo, U.S. Post Master General A.S. Bursleson, Chairman of the Public Buildings Committee Frank Clark, Chairman of the Appropriation Committee John Fitzgerald, as well as the Illinois U.S. Congressional delegation, to listen to a further presentation and discussion of this "vitaly important matter." The addresses and discussions of that conference, along with the resolution of the Chicago Association of Commerce's Executive Committee, supported by prominent citizens such as John Shedd, George Reynolds, James Forgan and Chicago members of Congress paved the way for a special hearing by the Committee on Public Grounds and Buildings of the House of Representatives on the bill for the purchase of the proposed site.

At the hearing, which was held on January 7, 1916, testimony was delivered by Mayor William Hale Thompson, Charles H. Wacker, Chairman of the Chicago Plan Commission; Ernest R. Graham, architect; Harry A. Wheeler, chairman of the Special Post Office Committee of the Chicago Plan Commission and Joseph Cannon, Representative in Congress. Wacker's testimony stated in part:

You cannot build too big to meet future needs...The story of Chicago's successive post office buildings is one chapter of inadequacy after another. No sooner has a building been finished than it has been proven too small for its purposes.. Remodeling, crowding and high-pressure methods have been put into effect in vain, the business of the office has always exceeded the accommodations provided. And that, gentlemen, in the nation's second city in population and premier producer of postal revenues.....The proposed Chicago post office will be at the pivotal center of the world's greatest postal system. Through the huge railway terminals nearby flows the most tremendous flood of postal matter that is centralized at any one point in this country. This flood of postal matter in Chicago manifestly affects mail distribution for the entire nation. As Chicago is the distribution center of the country, the facilities for that work in our city must be on a larger scale than in any other American city.<sup>3</sup>

While Chicago did receive the two block site, it did not immediately receive the full-service building that it so badly needed, and construction of the building that it did receive was delayed by World War I. The United States Mail Building of 1921 was constructed as a parcel post center and headquarters for the Postal Transportation System (PTS). In his speech of September, 15, 1915, Wacker said "The tremendous growth of

<sup>3</sup> "Importance of Chicago's Postal Problem in the Scheme of Commercial Expansion," *Fine Arts Journal*, 1916.



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the parcels post business must be reckoned with.... The fact that the parcels post business of Chicago already exceeds that of any other five cities of the country combined should be remembered...."<sup>4</sup>

Chicago was the nerve center of the mail-train operations, connecting 95 percent of all transit mails directly to the proper outgoing train. Chicago, birthplace of the Postal Transportation System, was the biggest hub of Railway Post Office (RPO) operations in America. The first Railway Post Office, (RPO), or railway mail car, was developed by George B. Armstrong, the assistant postmaster of Chicago in 1864, introducing the system that was later adopted for the nation to provide a faster and efficient system of mail distribution to the west. The first trial of this system was aboard a Chicago and Northwestern railroad car on June 9, 1864. Subsequently, the Chicago post office became the center for this system. The railway mail car was a practical postal station on wheels, so to speak. The car was lined with racks, cases and other equipment for receiving, sorting, and discharging large quantities of mail on the go.<sup>5</sup> By 1950, nearly 40 different RPO lines, most of them carrying from four to fifteen daily mail sorting trains, converged from all directions. Centered in Chicago were the new Chicago Terminal for the system (the United States Mail Building, consolidating many earlier terminals) six transfer offices, an airfield, nine division and nine district offices, large railway mail dormitories, organizations, and national memorials.<sup>6</sup>

### Federal policies and post office design

While the United States Mail Building was designed by Graham, Anderson, Probst and White in 1919 as part of the overall planning for Union Station, the design for the 1934 United States Post Office was completed during a short period of United States Postal Service history during which designs from local, private architects were utilized and welcomed. Between 1915 and 1930, this was not the case. In 1915, the Secretary of the Treasury ordered the implementation of policies that standardized the design of public buildings. Up to that time, under the provisions of the Tarsney Act in effect from 1893 to 1912, buildings could either be designed within the Treasury, under the Office of the Supervising Architect James Knox Taylor, or submitted to competitive bids among private architects and contracted out. Generally, the designs for large projects were produced by private architects. Government architecture of the period was most often either a simplified classical style characterized by symmetrical massing and unornamented surfaces, or in the Colonial Revival style. Towards the end of his tenure, against increased government construction costs, Taylor defended his view that the design process must be individual, and that federal buildings must be built to last and so must be of high quality materials and construction.<sup>7</sup> Taylor resigned in 1912, and was succeeded by Supervising Architect Oscar Wenderoth. In 1913 and 1914 there was little substantive change from Taylor's policies, except that Wenderoth's post offices

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 16

<sup>6</sup> Bryant Long, *Mail by Rail: The Story of the Postal Transportation Service*, (New York: Simmons-Boardman, 1951)

<sup>7</sup> Emily Harris, *History of Post Office Construction, 1900 - 1940*. Report prepared for the United States Postal Service, July 1982.

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typically employed Renaissance Revival stylistic details rather than the refined symmetry of Taylor's preferred Classical designs. The post offices built during this time brought the ideals of the Beaux-Arts movement to many small cities and towns.

The omnibus Public Buildings Act, in 1913, authorized the construction of a large number of public buildings and resulted in the standardization of their design. That same year, the Public Buildings Commission was established by Congress to recommend a scheme for standardization. The 1914 report, stimulated by the need to economize in government construction, resulted in far-reaching effects in towns across the nation. Categories were established for states and cities based on geographic and population conditions, along with "the use of type sets of plans and specifications in the erection of buildings which are to be used solely for post offices in the same group."<sup>8</sup> In 1915 the Secretary of the Treasury issued an order to establish a classification of buildings "to provide a rational system of uniformity and business economy in designing and constructing public buildings..."<sup>9</sup> The idea was to enable the office to produce an increased number of buildings at a lower cost than would otherwise have been possible.

Construction of public buildings tapered off with the onset of world War I, and came to a halt when America entered the war in 1917, one reason that construction on the United States Mail Building was delayed. However, the policies of standardization and efficiency continued throughout the 1920's. The next major change in policy came with the Public Buildings Act of 1926, known as the Keyes-Elliott Act. It was a general enabling act allotting \$100 million for federal buildings, with a \$5 million limit in any one state. The act directed the Secretary of the Treasury and Postmaster General to conduct a nationwide survey on the need for postal facilities and to direct the funds accordingly. Contrary to previous policy, it also authorized the secretary of the Treasury to hire outside architects in "special cases" to prepare designs and plans that would serve as guides for working drawings and specifications produced within the Supervising Architect's office. This was the first time since the repeal of the Tarsney Act in 1913 that the Treasury Department was authorized to hire outside architects.<sup>10</sup> The act did, however, continue the policy of efficiency, attempting to base new construction on an "as needed" basis rather than on political influence.

Full implementation of the Public Buildings Act was delayed by the stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent depression, but it became a tool to stimulate the development of public works programs that marked a new chapter in the history of government buildings. The Public Works Program was vastly expanded during

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<sup>8</sup> *Report of the Public Buildings Commission*, 63<sup>rd</sup> Congress, Second Session, House of Representatives, Doc. 936, (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1914) p.6.

<sup>9</sup> Harris, p. 9. Four classes of buildings were established, with Class A requiring annual receipts of \$800,000 or over. This class was the only one to provide for the finer grades of finishes and monumental treatment.

<sup>10</sup> Public Buildings Act of May 25, 1926 (United States Government Printing Office: 1927)

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the 1930's, and the number of post offices constructed during the decade was more than three times the number constructed during the previous fifty years.<sup>11</sup> Post office construction became public works that helped to stabilize the economy and relieve unemployment, in part through amending the Public Buildings Act in May, 1930 to authorize increased funding for public buildings. It also authorized the Secretary of the Treasury to "employ, by contract or otherwise, outside professional or technical services of persons, firms or corporations, to such extent as he may require."<sup>12</sup> Nearly one-half of the nation's architectural firms failed during the first year of the depression, and the Act of 1930 allowed the government to assist in reducing unemployment in the profession. Also, the appropriations for public buildings were increased by \$100 million by the Federal Employment Stabilization Act of 1931, which resulted in the addition of 267 staff members to the supervising Architect's office, increasing it to almost 800.

In 1933 the National Industrial Recovery Act created the Public Works Administration, authorized to disburse funds to both federal and non-federal agencies for construction projects that would benefit the public. Much of this was used for post offices. The construction of post offices continued under the auspices of the Treasury Department and was not under the authority of the Works Progress Administration, which was not established until 1935. Art work was introduced into post offices around the country during the depression era, partially as a means of employment. This was initially funded through the Public Works of Art Program organized in 1933 but terminated in 1934. A Section of Painting and Sculpture was then immediately added to the Treasury Department as a temporary measure. In 1935, the WPA funded the Treasury Relief Art Project, providing for works of art in government buildings by highly skilled artists. This resulted in high quality artwork in the interiors of government buildings throughout the nation.

The practice of employing private architects ended with an order of June, 1934, that all remaining federal buildings be designed by the Office of the Supervising Architect. The reasons for this were much the same as those of 1926, claiming economy and efficiency. As the economy improved, however, the policy was again reversed in 1939.

On May 23, 1932, U.S. Postmaster General Walter Brown laid the corner stone for what was the largest post office building in the world. The building was dedicated on February 16, 1934 but was not occupied until September 17, 1934. Former U.S. Postmaster General James Farley re-dedicated it on September 28, 1934 with formal opening ceremonies.

<sup>11</sup> Harris, p. 14

<sup>12</sup> An Act to amend the Public Buildings Act of 1926 (United States Government Printing Office, 1931)

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### Operations and Function of the Building

The system of getting a piece of mail from the post office to its destination did not change in its basic methods from the earliest days until 1960, when automated systems were first introduced. Through the 1950's, most all functions were performed by personnel, and speed and efficiency were limited by the hand/eye coordination, endurance and the reach of the human arm. The main function of a post office is that of sorting. The first step in the process was called "facing," or turning the envelopes all one direction to run through the canceling machine. At the new post office, a cancellation machine ran at the rate of about 25,000 letters an hour. Then the letter went to primary sorting, which was done in a "case," or cabinet of pigeon holes into which the mail was filed. In primary sorting, it was sorted according to the broadest categories of country, state, or large city. Then the secondary sorters sorted by cities and towns within a state, also using the pigeon hole system, and tied each of the sorted compartments into a bundle. Each bundle was labeled with a "facing slip," or label, indicating the time, the name of the clerk, and the source and destination city. Then the bundles were taken to the "pouching rack," where they were separated into open mail pouches for transport. All of this work was done with precise movements and timing, with checks all along the system to insure speed and accuracy. Each clerk engaged in the same sorting system tied bundles at the same time, locked and labeled them according to a fixed schedule.

The transportation system was operated with same precision. All uniformed truck drivers performed their work on a precise schedule, operating from various divisional headquarters in the city and from the main post office garage. Trucks delivered mail from mail boxes, and to airports, train depots and between various sub-stations, operating on a precise route, both to help meet tight schedules and to aid security. The post office was designed with many support systems for these procedures, as outlined in the following brief description of the building layout, taken from the commemorative booklet:

**Main Floor.** The original lobby was T shaped, extending south to Congress street from the existing north portion of the lobby. On either side of the south stem of the T were located the Postal Savings Bank, the wholesale and retail postage stamp windows, lock box Section, general delivery windows, special delivery, registry and money order windows, letter drop and information counter. Parcel post shipments from the general public were received at the east end of the lobby and transferred to the seventh floor for distribution and dispatch. On the south half of the main floor, mail was loaded onto trucks at 1,500 feet of enclosed dispatching platforms on the east and west sides.

**Second Floor.** In the north half of the second floor were located the accounting offices for the money order section and the registered mail, special delivery and special handling divisions which handled about 60 tons of material daily. On the south side of the second floor were receiving platforms, over 1000 feet long and accessed by a ramp from the south Harrison Street entrance. Mail was unloaded and an exit ramp returned down to Congress street.

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**Third floor.** The west central section was occupied by the print shop, which printed label for use in the dispatch of mail throughout the United States, as well as other material for the Postal Service. Adjoining the print shop was the Supply Section, supplying the Chicago post office and all its sub-stations as well as all third and fourth class offices in the state. It also housed the scales and general building maintenance supplies for all post offices in the United States and its possessions. The remaining work space on this floor was occupied by the Second Class and Permit Sections. In the office portion were located the offices of the Assistant Superintendents of Mails, Assistant Superintendents of Delivery, and Scheme Examination rooms.

**Fourth floor.** In the southwest portion of the work section, parcel post is sorted for delivery routes, and space is provided for centralized distribution of letters and other mails to carrier districts. In the northwest corner of the floor was the Carrier Section, where first class and letter mail were sorted for delivery in the business area of the Loop. In the north section, this floor also contained the Personnel Department and facilities for the comfort of personnel, including the Post Office Canteen<sup>13</sup>, Post Office Employees Credit Union Bank, a branch of the Chicago Public Library, a first aid station, and a recreation room. Among the offices on this floor were those of the Postmaster, Assistant Postmaster, Superintendent of Mails, Superintendent of Delivery, Auditor, Assistant Custodian, and the Property Manager.

**Fifth floor.** This floor contained workrooms occupied by the Delivery Division, which handled mail for city delivery. The south end of the floor handled paper mail and large circulars to postal stations; the center section handled redistribution of mail and small parcels to carrier stations, and the west side handled primary separation of city parcel post to stations. In the northeast section, COD parcels were checked for city delivery and shortpaid mail was handled.<sup>14</sup> This floor also contained the headquarters for the Railway Mail Service.

**Sixth floor.** The entire workroom section of this floor contained Mailing Division activities for final distribution and dispatch of parcel post. Parcels were received from trains and local deposit boxes, city stations, and directly from large mailers in Midwest States, and were placed in sacks to be transferred to destination points. The northwest corner of the floor contained the Rewrap unit, which reconditioned over 2,000 packages a day that had been insufficiently wrapped. Among the offices in the north section of the building was that of the Post Office Inspector in Charge.

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<sup>13</sup> The Post Office Canteen was both a cafeteria and restaurant, employing 100 people and serving up to 1600 people at a time. WPA, p. 34.

<sup>14</sup> Approximately 5,000,000 pieces were handled yearly that could not be delivered due to incorrect addressing. Ernest J. Kreutgen, Postmaster, *Chicago General Post Office: Largest Post Office Building in the World*, commemorative booklet (Chicago, Illinois: Post Office Department, 1931)

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**Seventh floor.** The seventh floor workroom handled the primary processing of the Mailing Division, separating domestic parcel and paper mails. Parcels were fed from "regulating reservoirs" onto two feed belts, approximately 400 feet long, accommodating 100 clerks. From the feed belts, the parcels were placed on various primary separation belts and conveyed to the floor below for final distribution. The Foreign Section, which handled approximately 68,000 letters and almost 38,000 pieces of miscellaneous parcel and paper mail daily, was located at the north end of the workroom.

**Eighth floor.** The entire workroom was devoted to the work of the Mailing Division, for cancellation and primary sorting of first-class and circular mails, daily papers, and special delivery and special handling parcels for locations outside of Chicago. On a peak day in 1934, 11 million pieces of letter mail were handled on the eighth floor with the use of 59 cancellation machines processing an average of 32,000 items each minute.<sup>15</sup>

**Ninth floor.** The ninth floor housed the Mail Bag Depository, which contained approximately 3.5 million bags with traveling cranes and moving belts to handle volume of mail sacks and pouches, all checked and received for storage. The south portion of the floor housed the Mechanical Section, and machines, carpentry, and mail bag repair shops, responsible for the maintenance of all mail boxes located throughout the city, as well as the repair of office machines, conveyors and other equipment of all city post offices. At the northwest corner of the ninth floor was the Inquiry Section and Tracing Branch. The Nixie Section, located in the southwest corner, "endeavors to decipher addresses on matter that cannot be distributed because of the address being in error, incomplete, or not readily understood."<sup>16</sup> The Dead Letter Office and Dead Parcel Post Offices were also located on the ninth floor, where letters and parcels were opened to determine if they could be delivered.<sup>17</sup>

**Tenth through twelfth floors.** These levels existed only in the north, office portion of the building where the ceiling heights were lower than that of the workrooms. These offices contained various government functions, such as the Sixth Army Corps offices on the tenth floor.

In addition to the functions housed in the main post office building, there were ancillary spaces elsewhere to provide support functions. A postal station known as the Old Post Office Annex was maintained in the federal building at Adams and Dearborn Streets, to accommodate the central business district. Throughout the city, there were 41 postal stations with delivery service plus additional contact stations. Other support facilities included the Motor Vehicle Services department, located at the New Central Garage at Canal and Polk Streets, and responsible for the 729 motor vehicles used for conveyance, collection and delivery of the mail.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> WPA, p. 36

<sup>16</sup> The Nixie Section handled 3.2 million pieces of mail annually. Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Kreutgen, *Chicago General Post Office*

<sup>18</sup> Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. "Historic Structure Study, Historic Main Post Office, Chicago, Illinois," Report prepared for

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### Transportation

The United States Post Office in Chicago was sited on a location which allowed for the integration of several different modes of transportation. Its location relied upon the rapid transportation of letters and packages; the building's design facilitated, at various points in its history, rail, automotive, and air transportation systems. As an effective information processing center, mail was sorted and distributed for both Chicago and the nation. The rails which served the post office were a physical link between Chicago and tens of thousands of small towns.

Railroads were first used to carry mail as early as 1832, in New Jersey. At that time, it was considered risky to entrust the mails to the dangerous, wood-burning "iron horses," and they weren't always faster than stagecoaches. The trains moved about ten miles an hour, and only at night. But as improvements were made and the railway system grew into an organized industry, rivalries sprang up between companies in the effort to secure mail contracts. There were many rivalries between the postal service trying to keep costs down and the railroad companies trying to increase them. In 1875, the first mail train ran from New York to Chicago in 26 hours, reportedly arriving one minute early.<sup>19</sup> By 1899 the east and west coasts had been joined by mail trains.

By 1940, few structures in the country could match the volume and coordination of the Chicago post office, as it served as a center for the reception, organization, and dissemination of information throughout Chicago and the region. In 1941, for example, 178 mail trains arrived at Chicago's United States Post Office and 192 departed in all directions.<sup>20</sup> The post office was also serviced by 75 special mail planes entering and leaving the Chicago area.<sup>21</sup> The roof of the post office became a home to a mail helicopter for a short period of time in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Over five thousand trucks entered and departed from the building every day. In the post office "equipment and all facilities for repair are maintained, including a body shop capable of rebuilding bodies of the trucks, a well-stocked carpenter shop, welding equipment, and so on. Some of the trucks carry the mail from the main post office to the airplane terminal and train depots; some of them work between a number of sub-stations, and others pick up mail from the corner mail boxes."<sup>22</sup> Each of these transportation systems ran according to a strict schedule which determined not just arrival and departure from the post office, but the entire route in between. The schedule was very strict, and the post office served as a central dispatch system. For example, "If a truck is late, an immediate inquiry is made at the previous stop. If this does not bring a satisfactory result, a report is immediately made and action taken to find the truck."<sup>23</sup>

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Hines GS Properties, Inc., September 18, 1997.

<sup>19</sup> By 1940, that schedule had been shortened by eight hours. WPA, p. 14

<sup>20</sup> Workers of the Writer's Program of the Works Project Administration, *35 Million Letters a Day: A Story of the Chicago Post Office* (Chicago: Board of Education) 1941 p. 12

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*

<sup>22</sup> *ibid* p. 11

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*.

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It was the extensive rail capabilities of the Chicago post office, however, which allowed it to serve as a strong link to the Midwestern region, and the nation as a whole. Although the building was situated on the Chicago River (an important viaduct between the Great Lakes and inland waterways), the water traffic had long since been outmoded by rail at its time of construction. In the site selection process, the need to place the new postal center near Chicago's two passenger rail stations was considered paramount. The original building, as designed by Graham, Anderson, Probst, and White, created a direct link to major rail lines by building over them. The banks of large freight elevators created a rapid physical link between the railroads and the postal sorting systems. Chicago was considered the "birthplace" of the postal transportation system, where Chicago postal clerks worked onboard the mail trains sorting and delivering mail:

Chicago, birthplace of the P.T.S. (Postal Transportation System), is the biggest hub of R.P.O. (Rail Post Office) operations in America and probably in the world. Nearly forty different R.P.O. lines, most of them carrying four to fifteen daily mail-sorting trains, converge there from all directions... New York does not even rank a poor second in the number of R.P.O. lines centering there.<sup>24</sup>

Towns throughout the Midwest were settled and sustained by the links to rail. Information, commercial catalogues, news, and products were all delivered by rail, and the post office served as a conduit for this system. The letters, magazines, catalogues, and items were processed and shipped directly from the post office to the trains waiting underneath. A heavy canvass sack became the link between remote areas and Chicago, it was able to be strung from poles for trains to pick up and drop off at a high rate of speed. "To give more satisfactory service to small towns a device was invented which enabled the railway mail clerks to pick up pouches of mail from a station while the train was traveling at high speed. The pouches are made of extra-tough canvas."<sup>25</sup> The role of mail trains, which served as a bond between Union stations and thousands of rural stations, allowed Chicago to serve as a true center of commerce, culture, and information. The utilitarian process of mail sorting and delivery was the lifeline between Chicago and small, rural settlements in the Dakotas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana and so forth. The increase in the ability to send and receive information had a fundamental impact on the social and economic development of the United States.

By 1940, an increasing quantity of the mail was being transported by airplane, with 75 airmail planes flying in and out of Chicago every day. The first regular airmail route had been inaugurated between New York, Philadelphia, and Washington on May 15, 1918, using Army planes and pilots. At first the air mail routes were not successful because the cities between which the planes could fly were not distant enough to give advantage

<sup>24</sup> Long, Bryant. *Mail by Rail: The Story of the Postal Transportation Service* (New York: Simmons Boardman) 1951 p. 32

<sup>25</sup> Workers p. 14



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over trains, especially since the airports were not very near the towns. An airmail route was, however, opened between Chicago and Cleveland in 1919, and by 1920, it was expanded between Chicago and Omaha and then to the Pacific coast with service from Omaha to San Francisco. By 1921 it was possible to fly from Chicago to New York by night, and in August of 1923, when the United States Mail Building was in full operation, the mail could go from coast to coast in 27 hours. Charles Lindbergh, chief pilot for one of the firms flying mail between Chicago and St. Louis, relates in his autobiography, *We*, some of the problems confronting early airmail. Twice it was necessary to bail out of airplanes on the route, but both times he saved the mail by taking it with him. In 1939, airmail service began to Europe, resulting in another step toward a smaller world.

Improvements and experiments in air transportation continued. In the 1940's, helicopter service was inaugurated for the delivery of mail, with landings on the roof of the post office and on the Merchandise Mart on the north side of the Chicago river. Initial trials were conducted in September, 1946 using five Sikorsky helicopters. The idea was to move mail efficiently between Chicago and nearby cities such as Waukegan, Aurora, Elgin, and Joliet as well as 100 other communities. By 1957, however, the service ended because the mail volume required larger helicopters, but the weight became too heavy to enable landing on the post office roof. The roof was not considered suitable for reinforcement to support the larger helicopters.<sup>26</sup>

### World War II and the Eisenhower Expressway

The post office was constructed with a 40 foot wide roadway in each direction, to provide three 10-foot wide through traffic lanes and an outer lane in each direction for traffic entering and leaving the post office. In 1935, soon after the new post office was completed, the Illinois Division of Highways proposed that Congress Street continue to the west as a 200 foot wide thoroughfare with depressed roadways. Three years later, a modification of the same plan with elevated roadways was proposed by the Committee on West Side Superhighways. All of these plans were intended to provide a thoroughfare for large volumes of traffic from the west side of the city and the west suburb to the central business district.

In 1939, extensions to the city's road system were proposed that included widening of Congress Street. At that time, two 40-foot roadways existed through the post office east of Canal Street. Three express lanes in each direction were planned east of the post office, and four in each direction west of Canal Street. A new bridge was also planned over the Chicago River at Congress Street. This program involved extensions to the State Street and Dearborn Street subways. The total cost of this work, including purchase of land and buildings for demolition and the new construction, was estimated at \$32,465,000<sup>27</sup> Other proposals included a combined subway-highway plan for congress Street and for an alternate location at Polk Street.

<sup>26</sup> Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates Inc. p. 18

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17 Information taken from "A Comprehensive Plan for the Extension of the Subway System," October 27, 1939. A report to the Commissioner of Subways and Traction, City of Chicago.

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The plan selected was the Congress Expressway (or Superhighway), completed in 1955 at a cost of \$128 million. It extends from Lake Shore Drive just west of Lake Michigan, straight west across Cook county, to connect with Butterfield Road in DuPage County. At the post office, the highway extends through the building in two 40 foot wide driving lanes and a pedestrian walk. West of the post office, the roadway drops to 15 feet below street level and continues at that grade. The City's chief engineer for subways and superhighways, called construction of the new expressway "the most difficult undertaking in any city in American history." More than 1,500 structures were demolished, and 2,000 families displaced, as well as the same number of businesses.<sup>28</sup>

### Labor History

The role of labor in the operation of the United States Post Office in Chicago reflects significant trends in American social history. The human labor required to process a daily capacity of over thirty five million pieces of mail was integrated with the complex transportation system. Much as in a factory, laborers at the Chicago post office were required to become an extension of a mechanized system. However, organized labor persisted at maintaining manual strategies throughout the post office's period of significance. Effective management strategies were used to supervise workers. The process of labor supervision was considered critical to running the post office; so in turn were the collective unions developed in response.

The architecture and design of the building and its components had an important effect on those who worked within it. The process of mail processing, sorting and delivery was a combination of human skill and mechanized precision. The postal system at Chicago was indicative of the laborer's struggles in the early and mid twentieth century: Manual methods and communication competed and coexisted with complex machinery.

The mechanization which did exist in the post office was nonetheless impressive. Over fifty elevators were used to move mail from floor to floor. Conveyor belts were used to move mail between divisions. The building, in its stripped down classical/Art Deco architecture, demonstrated the impressive amount of precision necessary to carry out its postal functions. It was a monument to both the workers within and the machinery which supported them. An excellent example of machinery used in the mail processing system was the canceling machine, which stamped letters to prevent postage from being reused. As described in 1941, the canceling machine "runs at high speed by electricity. Envelopes flip through at the rate of 25,000 per hour, more than 400 each minute."<sup>29</sup> The machine also recorded the location and approximate time of each letter's processing. Where letters had once been hand canceled by the personal stamp of a clerk's hand, a complex machine expedited the process, but until the 1960's, the machines continued to require intense manual monitoring.

<sup>28</sup> "Carving Chicago's Super-highway," *Illinois Bell Telephone News*, November 1952., 2-5.

<sup>29</sup> Workers p. 9

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After this process, however, workers hand-sorted the letters into "pigeon holes," as described above. The sorting process required incredible speed and precision. Every task was timed, and each individual employee had to complete a task at the same moment as his fellow worker. Hundreds of bundles had to be tied, and then resorted, all at the exact same minute.<sup>30</sup> The process, which relied upon a mixture of human labor and machinery, had to work like a clock.

The "pigeon hole" sorting process was very similar to a description of mail sorting in Chicago written in 1885. Noting the speed of one worker, the *Chicago Sunday Herald* noted that "he goes like a machine, and a high-g geared, double-action sort of machine at that."<sup>31</sup> Although clerks' hands may have acted like machines, the sorting process was still rooted in tradition. In 1960, the Postmaster General noted that "in the great central post offices of the twentieth century... hundreds of clerks must sit in rows doing the job in the same manner as the Colonial postmaster in Boston whose original desk is in our museum."<sup>32</sup> Until the mechanization of postal labor in the 1960s, each operation was done with only slight variations from the manner evolved in the past century, primarily by men and women handling monotonously repetitious chores as the postal load of the country rose up to swamp them. "...In the largest post offices, mail was still sorted by men standing before long racks of boxes, doing this chore exactly as it had been done before the Civil War."<sup>33</sup>

The "antiquated" method of hand-sorting remained at the Chicago post office until the postal service began to enforce "Operation Turnkey" which featured an automated sorting system in the early 1960s. Worker's dissatisfaction with such mechanization caused a three-week work stoppage in 1966 which halted the nation's mail service and forced a major restructuring of the entire postal management system.

Because the clerical workers at the post office maintained a high degree of physical control over the process of mail sorting and distributions, management felt it necessary to personally supervise clerks. The privacy and discipline of the postal system was ensured by the watchful eye of management. The clerks who sorted the mail were not allowed to alter or remove any of it. "For example, a clerk sorting mail for his own state or city is not allowed to take out or open a letter addressed to himself, no matter how urgent; every letter must go on exactly as addressed."<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.* p. 10

<sup>31</sup> "Travels of a Letter Through the World's Fastest Post Office" in *Chicago Sunday Herald*. 1885; Reprint in *Illinois Postal Historian* (Des Plaines, IL: private) November 1990

<sup>32</sup> Summerfield, Arthur. *U.S. Mail The Story of the United States Postal Service* (New York: Holt) 1960 p. 184

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.* p. 167-181

<sup>34</sup> Long. P. 185

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The desire of postal management to supervise workers was evident in the physical design of the post office. An unusual feature, representing the relationship between postal laborers and management, was 'Stuart's Alley,' a system by which those who sorted and processed mail felt as if they were under continual supervision. Stuart's Alley was named for a James E. Stuart, a Chicago postal inspector in the 1920's who first invented the system, which was eventually required by every post office building in the nation with a clerical staff of more than twenty persons.<sup>35</sup> The inspection gallery is a narrow runway with enough space for only one person to pass through. It is insulated with several layers of sound-deadening felt. At intervals there are windows, so designed that the inspector can look out and see what is going on throughout the entire floor without anyone seeing him. He can also see directly beneath him through openings in the floor of the 'Alley.' The gallery extends throughout most of the work spaces in the post office building; the inspector can observe what is going on in any of the departments. Further secrecy is provided by having the entrance to the gallery placed in a remote spot, allowing him to enter without the possibility of being seen by anyone.

The purpose of "Stuart's Alley" is, of course, to allow the inspector to apprehend anyone who might be stealing or misusing the mails in any manner. However, there is also a psychological value in the gallery system in that it acts as a deterrent to any temptations that an employee might have. Every employee is made to feel that an inspector may be peering at him at any time, thus "Stuart's Alley" is a constant deterrent in the mind of any postal employee who might otherwise become careless.<sup>36</sup> Systems which facilitated direct supervision of labor served to broaden the growing division between labor and management, which became a pattern in the industrial development of the United States. Labor, in turn, would react to the demands of supervisors.

As a center of the nation's postal and economic activity, Chicago was in turn a major force in the evolution of worker's rights. The post office had long been a center for collective unionizing activity. An important union, the National Federation of Post Office Clerks, was formed by several Chicago clerks in 1900. The development of labor activity in the Chicago post office also paralleled developments in ethnic relations. Labor at the Chicago post office was divided upon very sharp ethnic boundaries. The upper management was almost entirely German-American, although there were few of that ethnic group working in clerk positions. Workers of Irish descent held several important administrative positions, and in doing so fared slightly better than workers of Polish descent. "The Poles had hardly any high ranking supervisors"<sup>37</sup> The appointment of Ernest Kruetgen in 1933 as Postmaster created an atmosphere of discrimination for African-American and Polish-American employees which would last until his death in 1948 and the subsequent appointment of John Hadelien. The strict occupational division, and seniority, of different ethnic groups within a single structure represented an extension of historical trends which had their root in the rise of the industrial revolution.

<sup>35</sup> Workers. P. 12

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*

<sup>37</sup> McGee, Henry. "The Negro in the Chicago Post Office". M.A. Thesis: University of Chicago. 1961 p. 38

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While the division of labor based upon ethnic boundaries often prevented promotion, however, it also cemented communities. The role of labor in the Chicago post office demonstrated a relationship with Chicago's African-American community, which experienced tremendous growth in the first half of the twentieth century. Temporary workers, hired in the height of the Great Depression, were almost entirely African American, and included, among others, noted author Richard Wright. The National Alliance of Postal Workers, an African-American union, became very involved in partnerships with African-American community organizations on Chicago's South Side, as well as pursuing an important relationship with the Chicago Defender, a daily African-American newspaper.<sup>38</sup>

The "Alliance," as it came to be known, eventually gained a national membership and won important bargaining rights. The national organization was particularly active in the United States Post Office in Chicago. This fraternal and union organization became so strong that it was able to promote Henry Wadsworth McGee, a graduate of the University of Chicago, to the position of Postmaster. McGee, who wrote his 1961 master's thesis on the "Negro and the Chicago Post Office," was the first African American postmaster in the nation to head a Class A, large post office. Civil rights and union rights are both represented in the history of those who worked within the building.

The National Alliance of Postal Workers was first organized in 1913 in St. Louis to protect African-American workers from undue dismissal. It was formed both in response to an unfriendly postal administration and because the Railway Mail Association, a trade union, amended its charter in 1911 to exclude African-Americans from membership. In 1917, the Chicago branch of the Alliance was founded by J.W. Jones.<sup>39</sup> For its first fifteen years, the Alliance represented African-American railway postal clerks, before including postal clerks. During the early years of the Alliance, the number of nationwide African-American postmasters declined from 153 in 1910 to 78 in 1930. After admitting non-rail employees, the Alliance then enlisted the support of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) in the 1920s and 1930s. A notable early goal of the organization was the successful fight to exclude photographs of applicants from being attached to job applications.<sup>40</sup>

In Chicago, the majority of African-American workers were postal clerks in the "mailing division" who sorted mail during the overnight hours. White clerks were often promoted to day jobs regardless of seniority.<sup>41</sup> In

<sup>38</sup> *ibid* p. 50

<sup>39</sup> *ibid* p. 2

<sup>40</sup> *ibid* p. 5-9

<sup>41</sup> *ibid* p. 13

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1942, the Alliance filed a brief charging the Postmaster with ignoring the Fair Employment Practices Act.<sup>42</sup> A federal committee then proceeded to investigate while the postmaster denied any violations or discriminatory practices.

When John Hadelien was appointed Postmaster in 1948, the labor situation in Chicago changed. Hadelien developed a working relationship with the Alliance, began to promote African-American clerks to management, and hired the first women clerks since World War I.<sup>43</sup> Under pressure from the Alliance, Hadelien implemented a plan which published vacancies, and future promotions were based upon strict seniority and a trial period, rather than ethnic background. The advances made by the Alliance in the 1940s, working with community organizations and media, would be echoed in the Civil Rights struggles throughout the nation in the 1950s and 1960s.

### Architecture

The Acting Supervising Architect for the Department of the Treasury for this project was James A. Wetmore (1863-1940). He served as architectural supervisor for the Treasury Department in Washington, D.C. with 45 years of service. Obviously, a project of this size demanded a private architectural firm with both the experience and the expertise to design such a complex structure. The firm of Graham, Anderson, Probst and White was a natural choice, following on their success with the designs of the Civic Opera Building completed in 1929 and the Merchandise Mart completed in 1930, both mammoth buildings on the banks of the Chicago River. Throughout the early 1920's, the firm was a leader in the design of railroad stations, civic and cultural buildings as well as seven buildings for the Federal Reserve System. The success of the firm was based on its commitment to solid construction methods, good materials and reliance on the best designers it could find. The influences of Burnham, Graham, Anderson, and later designer Alfred Shaw, are all evident in the final product for the post office.

The lead partner of the firm, Ernest Robert Graham (1868-1935), began his career in the Chicago office of John Holabird, and joined Daniel Burnham in 1891 to work on the Columbian Exposition. He supervised much of the construction work, gaining a practical education as well as a lifelong admiration for Beaux Arts Classicism. Within ten years he became a partner in the firm of D.H. Burnham & Company, remaining Burnham's only partner until 1910.<sup>44</sup> At the time of Burnham's death in 1912 the company employed 180 men as one of the largest firms in the country. Graham was in charge of the design and working drawings department. After Burnham's death, the firm continued under the name Graham, Burnham & Company until 1917, when Graham reorganized, taking in three other employees as partners. These were Pierce Anderson, (1870-1924), a graduate

<sup>42</sup> *ibid* p. 53

<sup>43</sup> *ibid* p. 54

<sup>44</sup> Sally Kitt Chappell, *Architecture and Planning of Graham Anderson, Probst and White*. (Chicago: U of I Press, 1992) 265

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of the Ecole des Beaux Arts, who continued as head designer for the firm; Edward Probst (1870-1942), and Howard Judson White (1870-1936), who became partners under the name of Graham, Anderson, Probst and White.

Anderson, who continued Burnham's commitment to city planning on a grand scale and was recognized as an accomplished planner of architecture and urban spaces, had key involvement in the planning and siting, as well as the design of, the United States Mail Building. While Burnham's former partner Bennett was widely regarded as his successor in the planning field, Anderson was in fact responsible for the general plan and disposition of buildings along the Chicago River. Perhaps based on Anderson's European studies as well as preferences, in design he tended toward "classical tradition creatively adapted to the demands of new building conditions and types."<sup>45</sup> After Anderson's death in 1924, there were three gifted designers remaining in the department - Charles G. Beersman, Mario Schiavoni, and Alfred Phillips Shaw. By 1930, Alfred Shaw was the chief designer, and he worked closely with planning expert Sigurd Naess. This is the team that designed the Civic Opera Building, and was most responsible for the design of the United States Post Office building as completed in 1934. Born in 1895, Shaw had joined Burnham's firm in the 1920's, becoming a junior partner in 1929. He was a spirited designer. In the words of architectural historian Sally Kitt Chappell, "In the years he was with the firm, Shaw gave it a startling fresh image, bringing the more contemporary Art Deco forms of the late 1920's into the repertoire of the office."<sup>46</sup>

Following the stock market crash of 1929, the firm was left with only three major Chicago commissions to complete: the Field Building, the Merchandise Mart, and the United States Post Office. By 1934 when the post office was completed, the office had been reduced to 15 people.<sup>47</sup> The firm survived and exists to this day.

### Classical Revival and Art Deco Styles

In 1901, Secretary of the Treasury James Knox Taylor announced a return to the "classic style of architecture" for government buildings, which conformed to the spirit of the American Renaissance movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>48</sup> Influenced by Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 and the subsequent city beautiful movement, stylistic elements favored for public buildings were drawn from the French Beaux-Arts and neoclassical traditions. In particular, government buildings were designed to express Classical and democratic ideals and to symbolize power and organization. Colonial Revival designs were the second most frequently chosen for post offices, as both were considered symbolic of America's past and future democratic progress, and so increasingly became the symbol of the federal government.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 274

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 280

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 271

<sup>48</sup> Harris, p. 6

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As described by Peter Bonnet Wight, classical style ornament and form was characteristic of Commercial Style buildings in the first decades of the century, particularly as a result of the influence of the Columbian Exposition of 1893, and strengthened by the Burnham-Bennett 1909 *Plan of Chicago* which reflected a Progressive era desire for civic image and order. The 1921 United States Mail Building, while considered less commercial and more utilitarian since its function was to distribute mail by railroads, nevertheless reflected a concern for civic image in its original design. The building had a clearly articulated tri-partite facade of base, shaft and top, with ornamental belt courses dividing each. A formal public entrance faced north across the narrow end of the building, displaying four massive Doric columns extending to the belt course above the second story. The compound belt course included a frieze surmounted by a decorative panel with a cartouche. The long sides of the building were more utilitarian, with loading docks at the ground floor. While the entire north facade was removed when the 1934 structure wrapped around it, the ornamental belt courses remain, articulating the tri-partite facade division.

The facades of the United States Post Office building as completed in 1934 present a symmetric monumentality, with a modification of the tri-partite classical base, shaft and capital form. The elevation consists of an ornamental 45 foot base; a shaft that extends to the penultimate floor; and decorative upper stories surmounted by a simple cornice with four corner towers extending above. Moldings and belt courses strengthen the formula.

Classicism also lent itself to monumentality, and extremely large sites presented special problems. For lots wider than seventy or eighty feet, light courts were necessary to provide adequate sunlight and air to office interiors. For the largest sites that occupied a quarter of a block or more, the closed, hollow square or "O" plan, also called the "palazzo" plan, offered the most logical and economical arrangement. Of this type of design, two schemes were developed: offices could be placed in a single outer ring with circulation on the inner court, or aligned along a double-loaded corridor with both an outer and an inner ring of suites. The latter plan could increase the office area on each floor by fifty percent or more, and so was preferred if the site was large enough. In the post office, this plan was successfully utilized in the office tower portion.

During the 1930's, there was a renewed effort to create buildings symbolic of government strength and ideals, continuing the preference for classically inspired style. This resulted in a "stripped classical" style. This simplified classical style, as a synthesis of modern and classical stylistic elements, has been referred to by Lois Craig in *The Federal Presence* as "Starved Classicism." As a synthesis of the classical and modern, it evolved into Art Deco, with simple but often large, balanced mass lightly embellished with restrained geometric ornament.



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Structurally, Art Deco skyscrapers evolved out of the commercial style and the development of the skeletal frame with its emphasis on verticality and articulation of spandrels and piers. While the tall commercial buildings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were frequently sheathed in classical vocabulary and ornamentation, the gothic style also became a natural expression of verticality, as seen on the Reliance Building from 1895 (32 N. State Street, D.H. Burnham & Co.) as well as the 1923-25 Tribune Tower (435 North Michigan Avenue, Howells and Hood). While many buildings of the 1920's employed an eclectic mix of historic and cultural styles, the hallmark of the 1920's Jazz Age was modernism and a departure from historicism. Art Deco was the name for this style, which derived from the *Exposition Des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* held in Paris in 1925. That exposition was the culmination of progressive artistic movements of Europe and the United States which began just before the turn of the century in movements including Art Nouveau, the Glasgow School, the Viennese Secession, and German Expressionism. Adapted as a medium of progressive design, Art Deco promulgated geometric forms and both geometric and nature-inspired decoration.

As adapted to the skyscrapers of the 1920s the Art Deco style featured numerous distinctive characteristics. The verticality was emphasized by the continued use of slightly projecting piers and recessed spandrels on increasingly taller buildings, with the piers devoid of ornament and the spandrels at the lower levels presenting surfaces for stylized modern embellishment. Materials are smooth and flat, ornament is independent of historical precedent, low-relief and geometric in style. In addition to mixed-use planning, setbacks, pronounced verticality and use of towers and modernistic ornament, the distinctive characteristics of the style included the integration of modern art and craft, the emphasis of dramatic, theatrical entrances, lobbies and public spaces, and the use of exterior lighting for additional dramatic effect. As the decade of the 1920's progressed, the style became increasingly pared down, reflecting and celebrating the influence of the "machine age," and became known as Modernistic, or Art Moderne, characterized by rectilinear ornament, and motifs of fluting, reeding, chevrons and zigzags.

The United States Post Office in Chicago displays most of the characteristics of the Art Deco style, in its symmetrical and simplified form with corner towers, the use of repetitive slightly projecting smooth piers with recessed spandrels, and the low relief, non-historical detail of the ornament. Fluting decorates the spandrels, as well as the cornices and the elevator towers on the east elevation, which are topped by stylized American eagles. Chevrons ornament the storefront and window surrounds, with additional embellishment on door hardware and north facade entrance surrounds. The lobby of the building exhibits the most detailed Art Deco features, including the gold-leafed glass mosaic tiles on the walls, black Belgian marble trim, geometric marble floors and vertical fluted wall panels. The use of murals in the 10<sup>th</sup> floor office indicates the interest in this type of public artwork pre-dating the Works Progress Administration.

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### Comparisons

Graham, Anderson, Probst and White, as well as the Burnham Brothers, emerged as practitioners of the Art Deco style in the late 1920's. In 1928 Graham, Anderson, Probst and White produced the 22-story State Bank Building at 120 South LaSalle, and the Burnham Brothers designed the 23-story Engineering Building at 205 West Wacker, both buildings primarily classical in design but exhibiting traits of Art Deco. The Engineering Building is simple in its detailing and features uniform fenestration, with strengthened corners. Ornament is concentrated at the base and top, where ornamental piers project above the roofline in a manner more typical of Art Deco design. By the end of 1929 these firms were designing fully-mature, massive Art Deco structures. The Burnham Brothers' most prominent building is the Carbide and Carbon Building, 230 North Michigan Avenue (1928-29). A forty-story Art Deco skyscraper, it is distinguished by its black granite base, green and gold terra cotta shaft, and mottled-green top trimmed in gold-leaf. Graham, Anderson, Probst and White preferred a quieter, more classical interpretation of the style, demonstrating their large-scale Art Deco capabilities in 1929 with the 45-story Civic Opera Building at 20 South Wacker, the 38-story Foreman Bank building at 33 North LaSalle, and the world's largest building to that time, the Merchandise Mart, which were all completed that year.

The other firm practicing the style in the late twenties was Holabird and Root. While the Chicago Motor Club Building was being constructed in 1928, the firm was also finishing plans for the mammoth Riverside Plaza (Chicago Daily News building, 400 West Madison ) and the 36-story Palmolive Building at 919 North Michigan Avenue which were completed in 1929. They are notable examples of modern Art Deco because of their sheer size as well as their setbacks, stylized ornament, and dramatic public spaces. Due to its location along the Chicago River, Riverside Plaza, like the post office building, is horizontal in its massing, but uses vertical emphasis on the ends of the structure facing north and south. The Palmolive Building derives its primary verticality from the series of setbacks and alternating recessed tiers. Also, the Chicago Board of Trade Building (141 West Jackson Boulevard) was completed in May, 1930, another of the important Art Deco buildings.

There are no other comparable post offices in Illinois, as the few constructed during the depression are small, of simple modern construction. In the United States, post offices in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century generally followed the Classical Revival or Georgian/Federal formula, with notable Art Deco exceptions in the early 1930's, and some interesting regional style variations. In most towns, at this time post offices were designed much like the description from the National Register application for the Merced, California post office of 1933, "...the stylistic expression is neither avant garde nor strictly classical. It is a well-preserved and locally prominent example of its genre - a small public building of the early 1930's."<sup>49</sup> Many smaller post offices of the early 1930's were designed by federal architect James Wetmore, and tended to have similar features. Larger post offices, often utilizing private architects, had more variety and richer finishes.

<sup>49</sup> James H. Bruns, *Great American Post Offices* (NY: Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998)

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Daniel Burnham's 1914 post office in Washington, D.C. is illustrative of that firm's earlier work in designing massive civic buildings. It was part of an ensemble with Union Station next door, also designed by the firm. The post office, a white marble structure, was considered a model in construction, design and equipment. With granite, marble and alabaster finishing the design and ornate lobby, it presented a monumental example of Classical Revival. Having been vacated by the postal service, it has been rehabbed and now serves as office and retail space in addition to housing the 82,000 square foot National Postal Museum.

Other important Classical Revival post offices include the United States Post Office in Memphis, with its rich ornamentation and colonnade and the 1914 United States Post Office in New York city by McKim, Mead and White, with its massive, two-block plan only five stories tall and surrounded by a colonnade. The Washington D.C. Old Post Office Headquarters building was designed by William Delano and completed in 1934 with limestone pilasters, ornate cornices and belt courses. Perhaps most similar in spirit to the Chicago post office is the United States Post Office in Minneapolis, Minnesota, sited along the Mississippi River. It was designed by prolific post office designer Louis Simon and completed in 1934. Although smaller in scale (four stories) than Chicago, its monumental proportions and "stripped classical" to Art Deco transitional design resemble Chicago's. In the 1970's a parking garage was attached and in 1989 it suffered an expansion which almost doubled the size and altered the river setting.

Other Art Deco post offices, generally smaller than Chicago's, include the symmetrical design of the Hartford post office (1933) by Malmfeldt, Adams and Prentice with an Art Deco styled carved frieze and aluminum American eagles. It also has massive columns and is in a large sense transitional as well. The Miami Beach post office from 1935 is resolutely Art Deco, with a cylindrical rotunda decorated with a depression-era mural. The building was constructed as a Works Progress Administration project. In 1936 James Wetmore designed a symmetrical four-story Art Deco post office for Wichita, Kansas, of simple design in limestone. Fairbanks, Alaska has an admirable Art Deco post office (1932, George Ray) of reinforced concrete with aluminum spandrels and trim. Wilmington, Delaware's post office (1935, Associated Federal Architects) is more accurately described as Art Moderne style, with its simplicity rendered in stone. One of the more interesting post offices of national note is the Art Deco mixed-use skyscraper in Boston (1933, Cram & Ferguson) which features three distinctly vertical towers (about 18 stories each) above a five-story base.

Regional designs from the 1930's include many Spanish inspired small post offices in the western states. These include post offices in Tucson, Arizona (James Wetmore, 1930), a four-story Mission design with a colonnade with terra cotta embellishments; Yuma, Arizona, (Spanish Colonial Revival, 1933, Roy Place); Modesto California (James Wetmore, 1933). Florida also enjoys regional designs with the Spanish-Mediterranean Miami post office designed by a partnership between James Wetmore and Louis Simon in 1933, and the Spanish Colonial Revival Palm Beach post office, by Louis Simon, completed in 1937.

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### IO. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

#### **Verbal Boundary Description**

Parcel 1: Lot 11, except the west 20 feet thereof; also

Parcel 2: Lot 10, except that part which lies easterly of a straight line extended from a point on the east line of said lot, 71.04 feet south he northeast corner thereof to a point on the north line of said lot, 12.72 feet west of the northeast corner; also:

Parcel 3: That part of lot 9 lying north of, and adjoining, a line described as beginning at a point on the west line of lot 10 that is 337.61 feet, more or less, south of the northwest corner of said lot 10, said point being the northwest corner of that certain easement for street purposes (West Congress Parkway) as created by a grant recorded April 23, 1955 as document number 16218713; thence east along a line parallel with the north line of said lots 9 and 10, being a north line of said easement and easterly extension thereof, to the point of termination on the easterly line of said lot 9; except therefrom all that part lying easterly of, and adjoining, the following described line: beginning at a point on said north line of that certain easement for street purposes (West Congress parkway) that is 27.53 feet east of, as measured at right angles to, the west line of said lot 9; thence northerly along a line 27.53 feet east of, and parallel with, said northwesterly along the arc of a circle having a radius of 955.37 feet, a distance of 169.06 feet to a point of tangency; thence northwesterly along a straight line a distance of 71.67 feet to a point in said west line of lot 9 that is 71.04 feet south of the northwest corner thereof; also:

Parcel 4: All the land, property and space above horizontal planes above Chicago city datum at zero as established by ordinance passed by the City of Chicago in 1926, described as follows: starting at the south line of West Van Buren Street and measuring in a southerly direction along the easterly line of the property hereinafter described for a distance of 100 feet at elevation 20.00 feet; thence along the same line a distance of 100 feet at elevation 20.25 feet; thence along the same line a distance of 100 feet at elevation 20.75 feet; thence along the same line a distance of 40.97 feet, more or less, at elevation 21.00 feet to the north line of that certain easement for street purposes (West Congress Parkway) as created by a grand recorded April 28, 1955 as document number 16218713; the horizontal limits of which are the planes formed by projecting vertically upward and downward from the surface of the earth the boundaries of the following described parcels of land: that part of lots 9 and 10 described as follows: beginning at a point on the north line of said lot 9 that is 18.80 feet east of the northwest corner thereof; thence southeastwardly along a straight line, a distance of 138.35 feet to a point 42.15 feet, measured perpendicularly, east of the west line of said lot 9; thence southwardly along the arc of a circle having a radius of 985.37 feet, convex easterly and tangent to the above described straight line a

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

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Name of Property: United States Post Office  
County and State: Cook County, Illinois

distance of 174.37 feet to its point of tangency with a line 57.53 feet east of and parallel to said west line of lot 9; thence south along the above mentioned parallel line, a distance of 12.28 feet, more or less to its intersection with the north line of that certain easement for street purposes (West Congress Parkway) as created by a grant recorded April 28, 1955 as document number 16228713; thence west along said north line, being a line parallel with the north line of said lots 9 and 10, a distance of 30.00 feet to a line that is 27.53 feet east of, as measured perpendicular to, and parallel with, said west line of lot 9; thence north along said parallel line to a distance of 28.06 feet to a point of curvature; thence northwesterly along the arc of a circle having a radius of 955.27 feet, being concentric with the above described arc of 985.37 foot radius, a distance of 169.06 feet to a point of tangency; thence northwesterly along a straight line, tangent to the last described arc, a distance of 71.67 feet to a point in said west line of lot 9 that is 71.04 feet south of the northwest corner thereof; thence continuing northwesterly along the last described course extended to a point on the north line of said lot 10 that is 12.72 feet west of the northeast corner of said lot 10; thence east, along the north line of said lots 9 and 10 to said point of beginning; also:

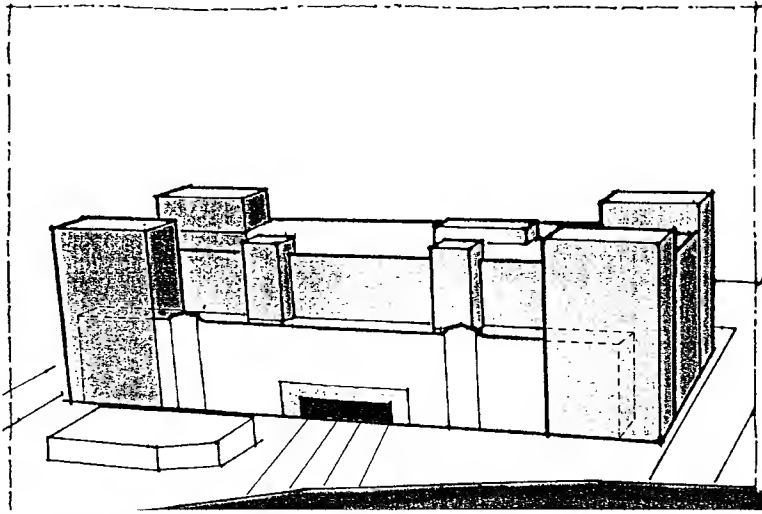
Parcel 5: That part of lot 9 lying north of, and adjoining, a line described a beginning at a point on the west line of lot 10 that is 337.61 feet, more or less, south of the northwest corner of said lot 10, said point being the northwest corner of that certain easement for street purposes (West Congress Parkway) as created by a grant recorded April 28, 1955 as document number 1621873; thence east along a line parallel with the north line of said lots 9 and 10, being a north line of said easement and the easterly extension thereof, to the point of termination on the easterly line of said lot 9; except therefrom all that part lying westerly of, and adjoining, a line described as follows: beginning at a point on the north line of said lot 9, 17.80 feet east of the northwest corner thereof; thence southeastwardly along a straight line, a distance of 138.35 feet to a point 42.15 feet, measured perpendicularly, east of the west line of said lot 9; thence southwardly along the arc of a circle having a radius of 985.37 feet, convex easterly and tangent to the above described straight line, a distance of 174.37 feet to its point of tangency with a line 57.53 feet east of and parallel to said west line of lot 9; thence south along the above mentioned parallel line, a distance of 28.28 feet, more or less, to its intersection with the north line of that certain easement for street purposes (West Congress Parkway) as created by a grant recorded April 28, 1955 as document number 16218713;

All of the above parcels being in railroad companies resubdivision of blocks 62 to 76, inclusive, 78, parts of 61 and 67 and certain vacated streets and alleys in School Section Addition to Chicago, being a subdivision of Section 16, Township 39 North, Range 14 East of the Third Principal Meridian, in Cook County, Illinois.

### Boundary Justification

The above described lots and boundaries constitutes all property historically associated with United States Post Office in Chicago, including the physical building and its immediate setting.

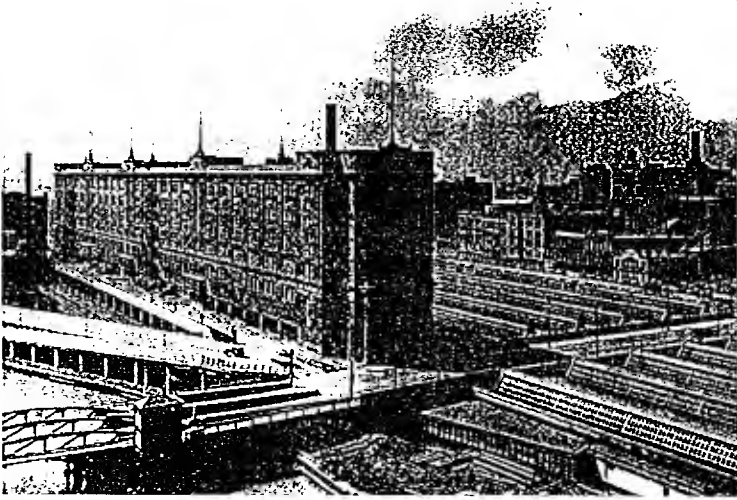




H03 DIAGRAM SHOWING ORIGINAL 1921 BUILDING LAYOUT  
SEPTEMBER 2000



H04 VIEW FROM THE NORTHWEST  
CA. 1934

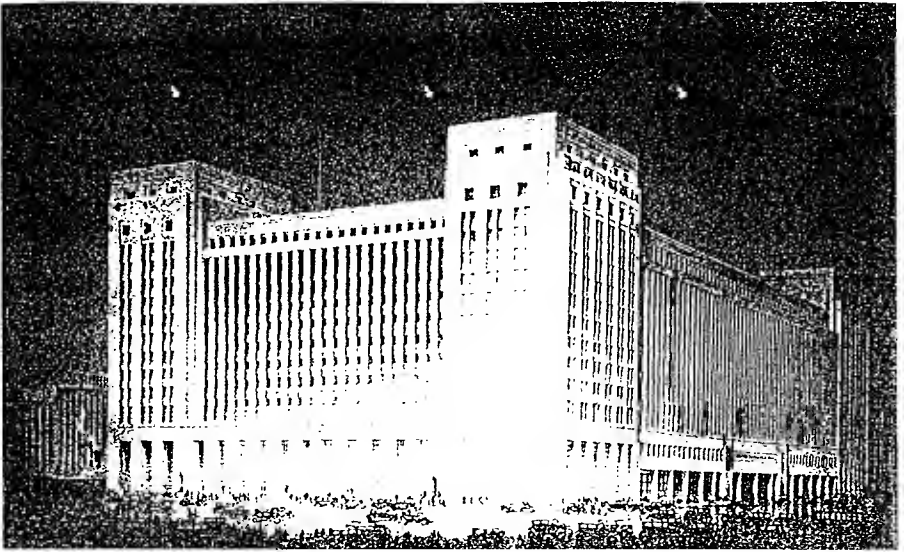


H01 1921 BUILDING  
CA. 1925

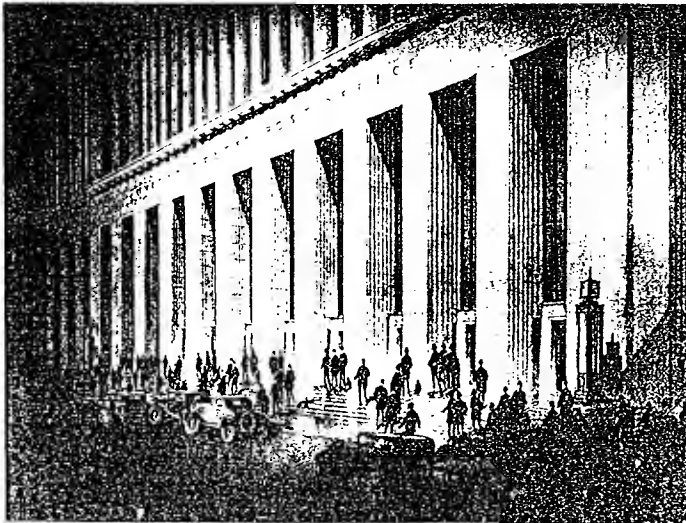
U. S. POST OFFICE - S. W. FROM BOARD OF TRADE OBSERVATORY 1951



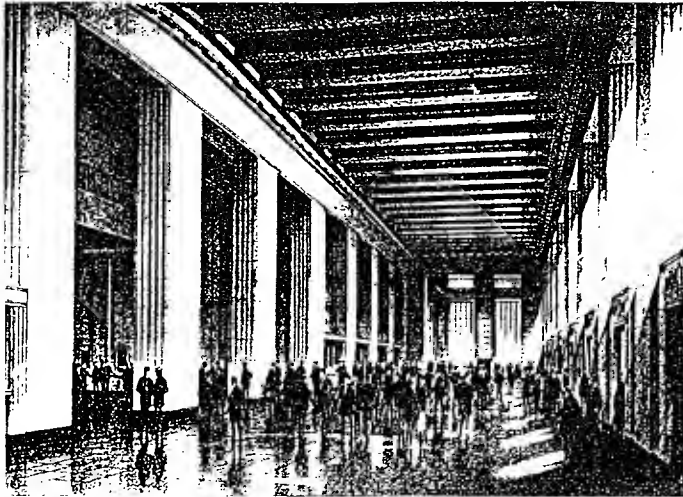
H02 AERIAL VIEW  
CA. 1934



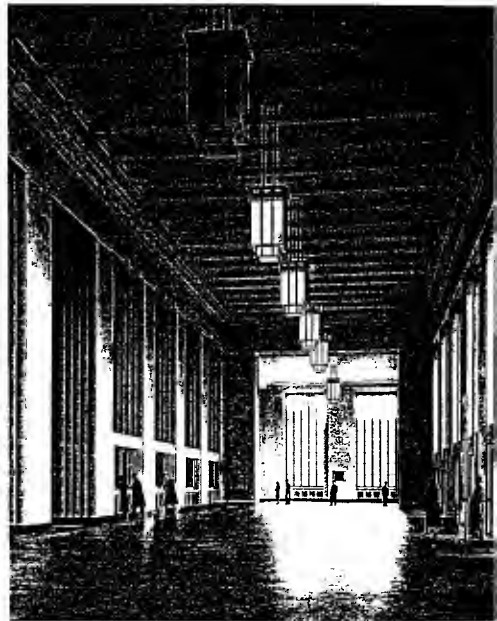
H05 ARCHITECT'S RENDERING  
1932



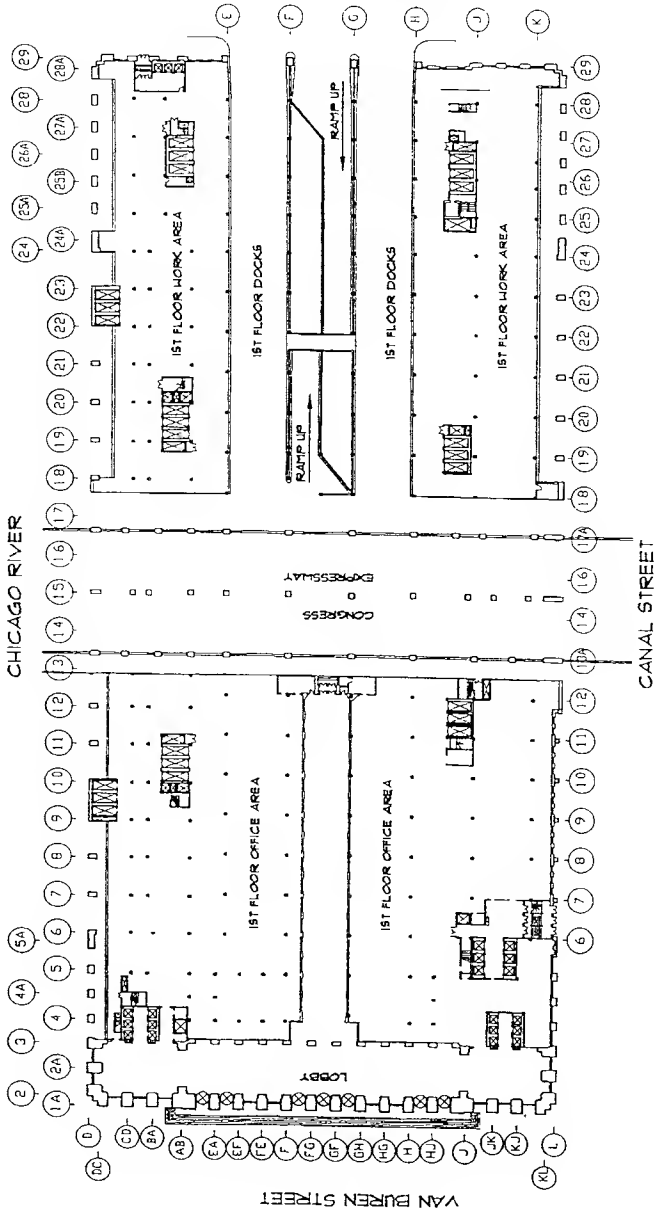
H06 ARCHITECT'S RENDERING  
1932



**H07 ARCHITECT'S RENDERING**  
1932



**H08 MAIN LOBBY**  
CA. 1934



**FIRST FLOOR**

SCALE: 1" = 90'-0"

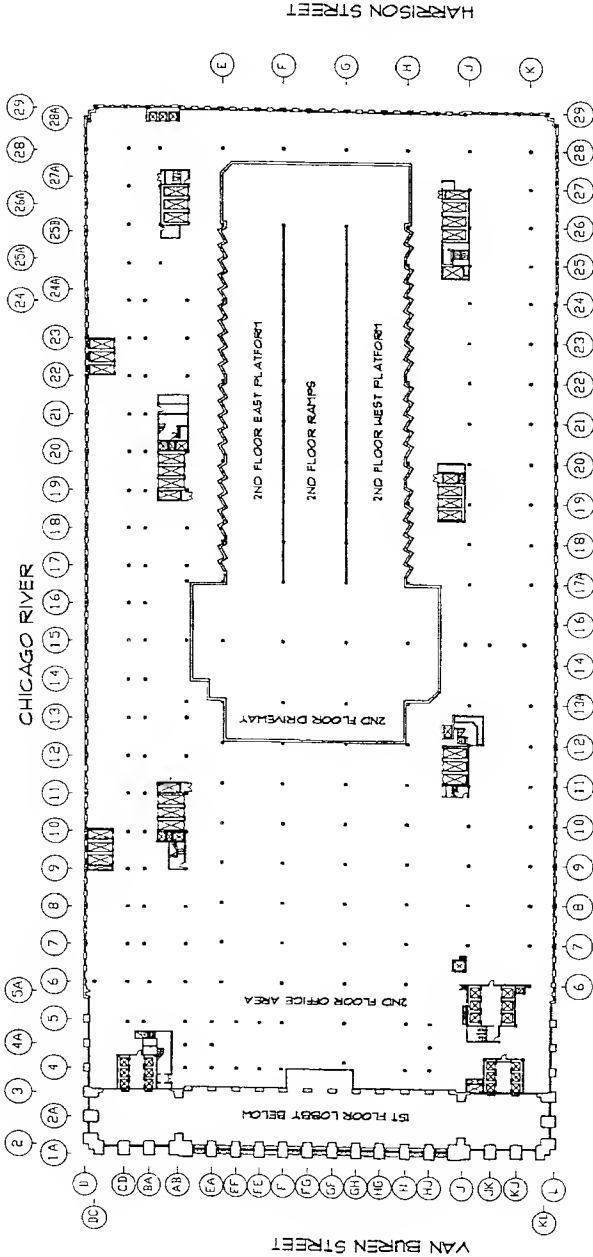


NORTH

Hines GS Properties, Inc.  
 70 West Madison Street - Suite 440, Chicago, Illinois 60602 312/419-4900

Old Chicago Main Post Office

DATE



CANAL STREET



2 SECOND FLOOR  
 1/16" = 1' - 0"

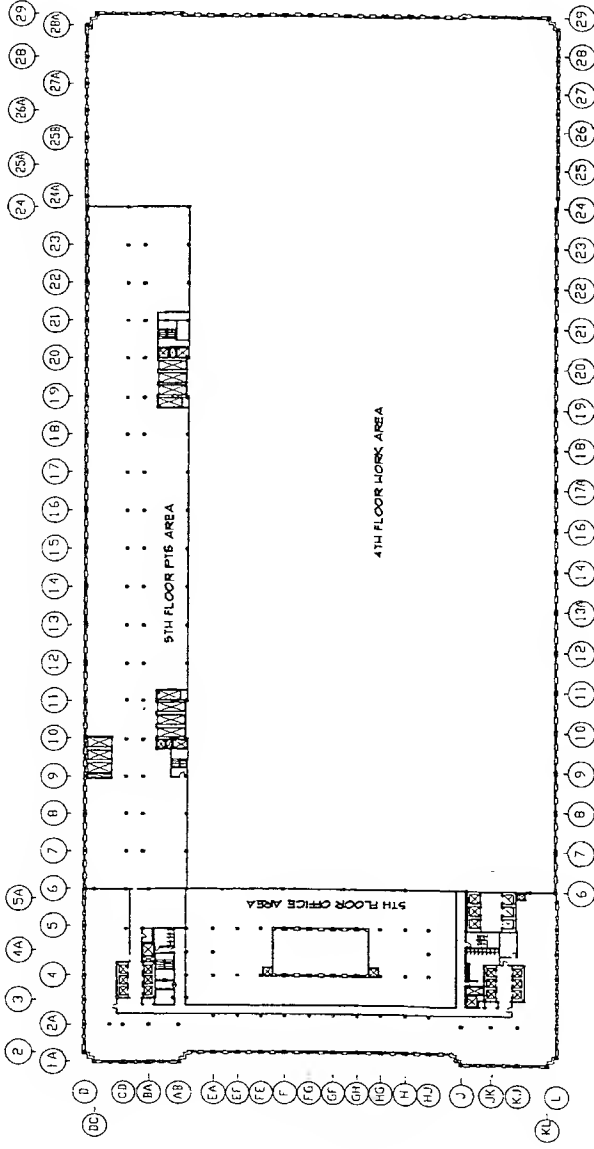
Hines GS Properties, Inc.  
 70 West Madison Street - Suite 440, Chicago, Illinois 60602 312/419-4900

Old Chicago Main Post Office

DATE

7/21/97

CHICAGO RIVER



VAN BUREN STREET

HARRISON STREET

CANAL STREET



NORTH

5 FIFTH FLOOR

SCALE: 1" = 90'-0"

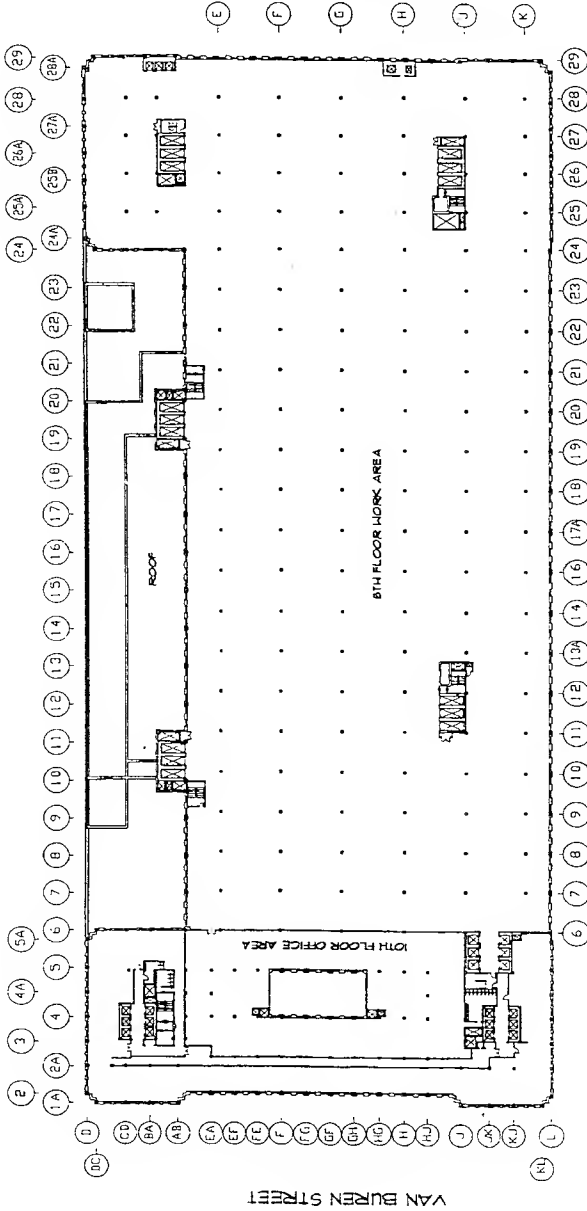
Hines GS Properties, Inc.  
 70 West Madison Street - Suite 440, Chicago, Illinois 60602 312/419-4900

Old Chicago Main Post Office

DATE

8/7/97

CHICAGO RIVER



VAN BUREN STREET

HARRISON STREET

CANAL STREET



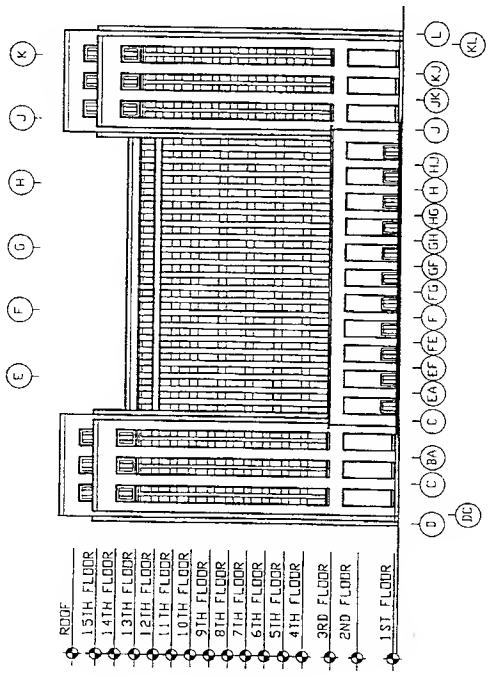
10 TENTH FLOOR  
 1/100' SCALE: 1" = 90'-0"

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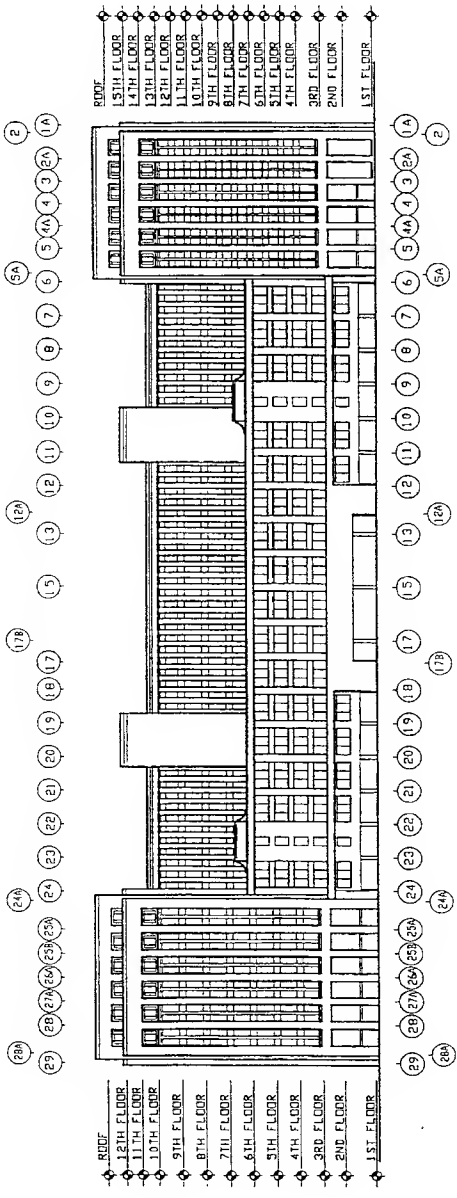
- ◆ ROOF
- ◆ 13TH FLOOR
- ◆ 14TH FLOOR
- ◆ 13TH FLOOR
- ◆ 12TH FLOOR
- ◆ 11TH FLOOR
- ◆ 10TH FLOOR
- ◆ 9TH FLOOR
- ◆ 8TH FLOOR
- ◆ 7TH FLOOR
- ◆ 6TH FLOOR
- ◆ 5TH FLOOR
- ◆ 4TH FLOOR
- ◆ 3RD FLOOR
- ◆ 2ND FLOOR
- ◆ 1ST FLOOR

VAN BUREN STREET (NORTH)  
ELEVATION

1/100 SCALE: 1" = 80'-0"

Hines GS Properties, Inc.  
70 West Madison Street - Suite 440, Chicago, Illinois 60602 312/419-4900  
Old Chicago Main Post Office

DATE  
7/21/97



PRIVATE DRIVE (EAST)  
ELEVATION

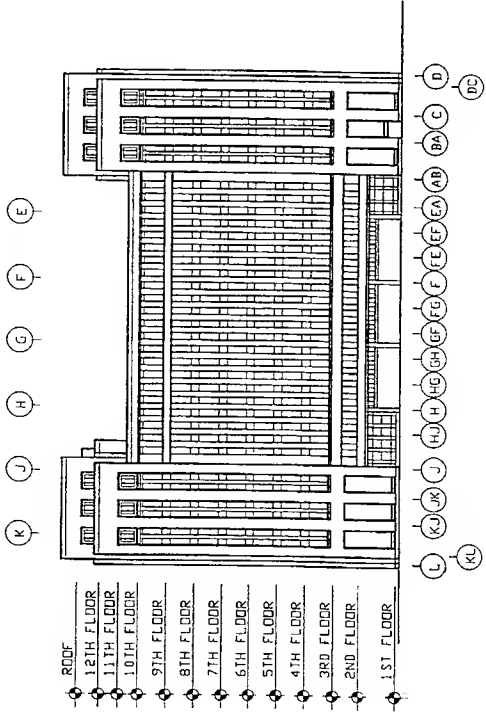
1/100 SCALE: 1" = 100'-0"

Mines CS Properties, Inc.  
70 West Madison Street - Suite 440, Chicago, Illinois 60602 312/419-4900

Old Chicago Main Post Office

DWIT

7/21/91



HARRISON STREET (SOUTH)  
ELEVATION

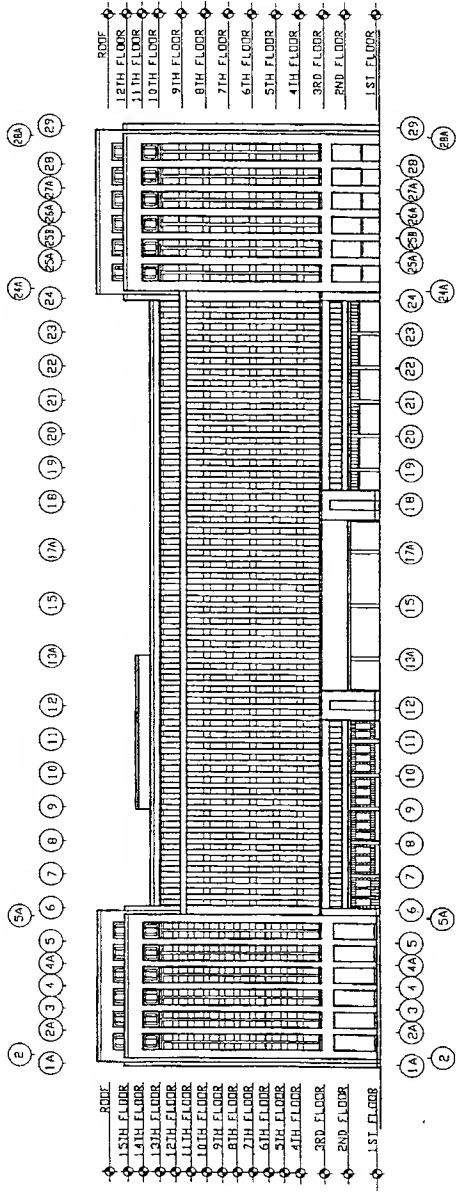
SCALE: 1" = 80'-0"

Hines CS Properties, Inc.  
70 West Madison Street - Suite 440, Chicago, Illinois 60602 312/419-4900

Old Chicago Main Post Office

DATE

7/7/97



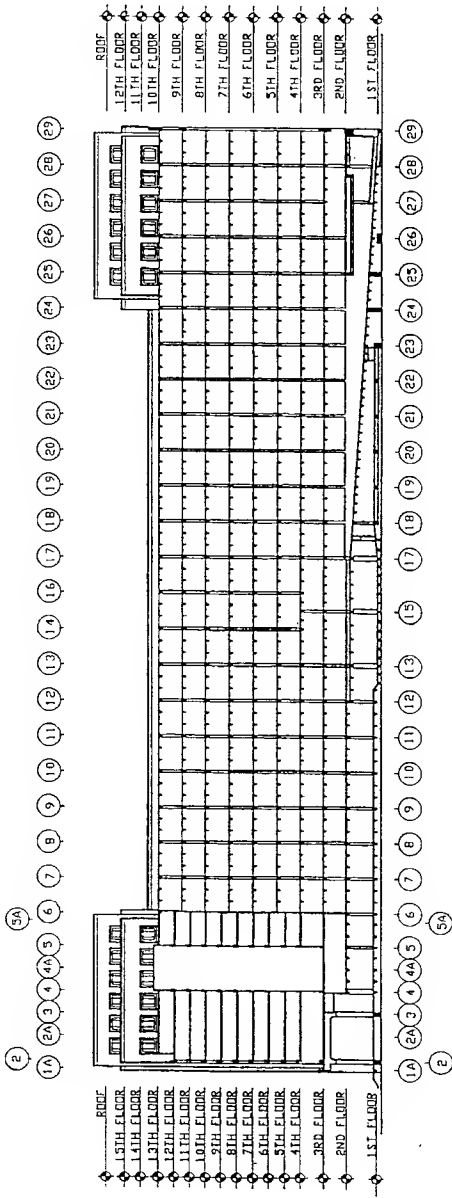
CANAL STREET (WEST)  
ELEVATION

SCALE: 1" = 100'-0"

Hines GS Properties, Inc.  
70 West Madison Street - Suite 440, Chicago, Illinois 60602 312/419-4900

Old Chicago Main Post Office

DATE  
8/7/97



LONGITUDINAL SECTION  
 BETWEEN COLUMN LINES 'F' & 'G'  
 SCALE: 1" = 100'-0"

